SHORTY McCABE LOOKS 'EM OVER

SEWELL FORD

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"'HEY, YOU! THIS WAY OUT. AH, YES, YOU WILL, OR I'LL LET LOOSE THE EXTINGUISHER ON YOU.'"

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BY

SEWELL FORD

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NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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CHAPTER I

A LATE FLOP BY HICKS

I COULD tell by the worried look in Sadie's eyes as she watches for me to swing off the smokin' car and come down the platform that something was wrong. Besides, I usually like to hoof it home from the station; so it ain't often she meets me with the car. Which is why I ask, right off the bat, what's up.

"Sully!" says she. "He—he's been gone since right after breakfast!"

"Huh!" says I. "The young tarrier! Ain't spendin' the day at Dominick's again, is he?"

"No; I've been over there," says she. "They haven't seen him."

"Or at the Baileys'?" says I.

She shakes her head. "Both the Bailey boys are away," says she. "In camp, you know."

"Didn't anybody around the house see him leave?" I goes on.

"It seems not," says Sadie. "Mother Whaley and I were busy with baby sister, and the others say they thought he was playing about the grounds. He's always so starved and eager for his luncheon too; but to-day he

—he didn't come at all. I don't know where he can be or what can have happened."

At which Sadie chokes up a bit and gets a firm grip on one of my hands.

"There, there!" says I. "You know what boys are. And Sully's gettin' to be quite a young husk, remember."

"But nine hours!" says Sadie. "He's never been away that long before. And I don't know where to look."

"Pooh!" says I. "Likely he's at home by now. Let's go see."

He wasn't, though, and Mother Whaley was just on the point of telephonin' the police.

"Ah, stow that!" says I. "Those town flat-foots couldn't find a lost elephant unless it stepped on 'em. Let's do our own sleuthin'. First off, what was he wearin'?"

"Sure, ain't I tellin' ye no wan saw the darlint go?" wails Mother Whaley. "So how should we——"

"Can't you tell by what's missin'?" says I.

"Of course," says Sadie, and makes a dash for Sully's room. In two minutes she reports: "I don't find his Scout hat and leggings."

"Then he must have 'em on," says I. "That gives us something to describe. Come on, Sadie; we'll take a jaunt around in the car."

It's a wonder too I didn't have bean enough to follow the hunch closer; for Sully's been wild over this Boy Scout business ever since they got

up a comp'ny among the town boys. Course he is 'most too young to join; but we had to buy him off with an imitation outfit,—hat, leggin's, and red cotton handkerchief to drape around his neck,—and he's been wearin' the costume constant.

Still, all I thought of was that he was around the neighborhood somewhere, playin' Scout; so we starts to make a circuit, stoppin' now and then to ask people if they'd seen him. Nobody had. We'd covered some ground too in half an hour, and it was just by accident I'd turned into this Dunkirk Pike.

"But he couldn't have got as far away as this," protests Sadie. "Why keep on?"

"I don't know," says I; "only I thought we'd run up here and then cut through and come back along the Post Road."

We was eight or nine miles from home then, and goin' north at that; so it did seem sort of hopeless. It was near half-past six too. I'd come to the cross road, and was just makin' the turn, when I gets a glimpse of something comin' down the pike. On a chance I slows up and waits. Pretty soon we could make out a tall, slim party walkin' along, holdin' a youngster by the hand. A minute more and Sadie sings out gleeful:

"Oh, it's Sully! I'm sure it's Sully!"

She's right; for when the pair comes trudgin' along there's little Sully in his broad-brimmed hat, his face all streaked with dust and sweat,

and his feet movin' draggy. Don't take long either for Sadie to gather him in.

"Ah, say!" says Sully, tryin' to wiggle free. "Don't squeeze a feller so tight."

"But, dear," says Sadie, "where have you been? Were you lost?"

"Lost!" echoes Sully disgusted. "Say, ma, I was just takin' a hike, that's all. Wa'n't I, Mister Bob?"

At which the tall, kind of stoop-shouldered stranger who'd been towin' him along chuckles good-natured.

"Rather an ambitious hike too for such short legs," says he. "He was bound for Camp Pemiwassett."

"But that's twenty miles!" gasps Sadie. "We drove up there only the other day. You didn't think you could walk that far, did you, Sully?"

"I guess Chick Bailey did it," says Sully. "I'd done it too, if—if my shoe hadn't hurted."

"Blisters," puts in the stranger. "It was all the fault of the shoe, I assure you. We managed to fix it up with a little absorbent cotton and surgeon's tape. Even then Master Sully didn't want to give up. I fear I persuaded him to turn back. The fact is, we were having such a good time together, that I was rather selfish about it. You have a real boy there, if Sully will pardon the personal remark. Mr. and Mrs. McCabe, I presume? My name is Leavitt."

It seems they'd run across each other about four o'clock, when the blisters were just gettin' in their fine work, and after some little talk Sully had been induced to ride pigback into the nearest town, where Mr. Leavitt had applied first-aid treatment outside a drug-store. They were strikin' for the Rockhurst trolley when we found 'em.

So that's how we happens to entertain Mr. Bob Leavitt at dinner that night. Kind of a seedy-lookin', middle-aged gent he is, when we get him in a good light. He needs a shave and hair-cut, and his clothes could have stood a trip to the pressin' club. I expect that's why he shies so at comin' home with us; but of course we wouldn't listen to anything else.

A soft-spoken party he is, though, with a quiet, chuckly laugh and mild, deep-set eyes. So it wa'n't long before we'd completely forgotten the chin stubble and the outin' shirt. Didn't have much to say about himself. In a vague sort of way, though, he hints how he'd been laid up for a spell with the collywobbles or something, due to the grub dealt out in the third-class cabin of some steamer that he'd come over on, and that he'd been on a walkin' trip since leavin' the hospital, tryin' to get back in shape.

"It's my great cure-all—walking," says he.

"Mine too," says I. "Ever tramped much in this section before?"

"No," says he. "I've been in the States

very little these last dozen years. I've heard of Rockhurst-on-the-Sound, however. I believe that someone I used to know is living here."

"That so?" says I.

"Morton Hicks," says he.

"Oh!" says I. "Morton J."

He nods. "We used to go to school together years ago up in Utica," he goes on. "I haven't seen him since; but I—I thought I'd look him up sometime."

"Sure," says I. "He's one of our solid citizens, Hicks. Just moved into his new house. Suppose I run you around there after we've had our coffee?"

Leavitt hesitated a bit. "I don't know as I ought to go—like this," says he, rubbin' his hand over his chin doubtful.

"Oh, what's the odds?" says I. "An old schoolmate! He's no silk-stockin', Hicks. Well fixed, I guess, and all that; but no great swell. Course it looks like he meant to cut quite a figure soon, with that near-Moorish mansion of his. Kind of fond of showin' it off, I understand. Come along. I've been meanin' to drop in on him myself some evenin'."

Maybe I shouldn't have urged him; but it seems the decent thing to do, specially since he'd been so good to little Sully. Anyway, I gets him started. I expect I was a little curious to get a line on him. Then too it was up to me to be a little sociable with Hicks. He'd

been livin' here two or three years sort of quiet in a rented place, and then all of a sudden he'd branched out and built this big, fancy house.

Fancy may not be just the word, but that's the way it strikes me. Even by moonlight, as we swings in through the high-arched white gateway and up the cement drive, it looms up sort of pompous and showy on the bare top of the hill. But Hicks is a bit that way himself, —one of these chesty, high-shouldered parties that walks heavy on his heels and waggles his head when he talks. Just the kind of a house, come to think of it, you'd expect him to build.

It's more or less a whale of a joint, all white cement, with the walls carried above the roof and cut up odd, like the top of a fort, or the front of a storage warehouse. The entrance is some flossy, bein' through a twenty-foot arch, with the inside all worked out in diff'rent colored tiles, like a movie palace, and illuminated brilliant by a bunch light.

" 'Most knocks your eye out, don't it?" says I, pushin' the button.

Leavitt only smiles and gazes around curious while I interviews the grouchy-lookin' butler. First off the prospects of our gettin' any further than the mat didn't look good; but in a minute or so back trots the flunky actin' quite diff'rent. He throws the big door open wide and tows us into the grand reception-room, where Mr. Hicks, in full evenin' regalia, and

wearin' a thick black cigar jaunty in one side of his face, is waitin' to greet us.

"Why, hello, Shorty McCabe!" says he. "About time you were getting around to see us. And you've brought a—er—why——"

The cordial hail is choked off abrupt, and he stands starin' surprised at Leavitt. It's plain he don't quite place him.

"I hardly thought you'd remember me," says the boyhood friend. "Bob Leavitt, who used to go to the old Webster Street School when you did; under Jumbo Williams, you know."

"Oh!" says Mr. Hicks. "Slat Leavitt, eh?"

"That's right, Tubby," says Leavitt, beamin' friendly.

But that don't work up a chummy response from Hicks. He's gazin' critical at the outin' shirt, takin' in all the details of the baggy trousers, dusty shoes, and chin stubble.

"Huh!" says he. "How'd you come to find me?"

He don't even offer to shake hands, and Leavitt smiles sort of fussed. So I jumps in and explains how he'd rescued little Sully on the road, and how, when he'd mentioned knowin' a Mr. Hicks that lived here, I'd insisted on bringin' him round. Hicks nods, but don't enthuse.

"Tramping, eh?" he sniffs. "Looks as though you'd done a good deal of it too."

Which struck me as puttin' it kind of raw.

But Leavitt don't seem to get peeved. He just shrugs his shoulders careless.

"I have," says he. "I find it a good way to see the country and indulge in fresh air."

"I do my sight-seeing from a touring car or a limousine," says Hicks. "I've got both."

"Have you?" says Leavitt. "Been getting on, haven't you, Tubby?"

"Say, if you don't mind," cuts in Hicks, "just forget that old nickname, will you? I never did like it much."

"Oh, certainly," says Leavitt, smilin' amused.

"Yes, I've been getting on, as you say," Hicks adds, swellin' out his chest. "And you know where I started; not on Genesee Street, like you. Nor I didn't get to any college. I learned how to work, though, and how to make others work for me; which is more'n some can say who used to think I was a joke."

He wags his head cocky after this speech and pats the bulge of his watered-silk evenin' vest approvin'. So our little reunion wa'n't turnin' out such a huge success, after all. Leavitt, though, don't seem disturbed. He glances round at the pink satin chairs and sofas, at the silk rugs on the floor, and at the showy chandelier swung from the high ceilin'.

"No doubt about that," says he. "Let's see, you're in some manufacturing line, aren't you?"

"Drain pipes," says Hicks.

"Really!" says Leavitt. "Why, that's odd!"

Struck me he says it pleasant and inoffensive enough; but Hicks turns on him sharp.

"Yes, drain pipes," he snaps, "just common, ordinary drain pipes—for sewers and such! Nothing high flown about 'em; but this is what they bring in," and he waves a dumpy hand around lordly.

"You sure have got a swell place here," says I, tryin' to switch the line of chat to safe grounds. "I've heard about your dinin'-room decorations too."

That soothes him down sudden. "Come on," says he. "I'll show you through."

He includes Leavitt with a jerky nod, so we starts off on a grand tour of the house. And when Hicks gets started exhibitin' his new home he does it thorough. We has to inspect everything, from the vacuum cleaner machine in the basement to the oriental garden on the roof. He tells us how many square feet of mural decorations it took for the dinin'-room, and what it cost him to put in them sunken marble tubs in the bath-rooms. I admires tapestry hangin's and Circassian walnut wainscotin' and so on until I'm nearly hoarse sayin' "Great stuff! Bully! Fine dope!" and I'm glad when he leads us back to his Turkish smokin' den on the first floor. By that time Hicks is feelin' so good that he sets out mineral water, Scotch, and cigars.

"So you see what can be got out of drain pipes," he shoots significant at Leavitt. "Now I suppose you've been makin' a fortune writin' poetry?"

Leavitt laughs easy. "You don't mean, Hicks," says he, "that in all this time you haven't forgiven me for those jingles in our school paper?"

"I haven't forgotten, anyway," says Hicks. "'Tubby, or not Tubby,' they began. Oh, you had a lot of fun with me then, didn't you? Had all the girls laughing at me. For months after that they'd giggle whenever I came near. One of the smart ones, you were! Well, where has it landed you, eh?" And Hicks looks him over scornful. "Got anything like this," he demands, "to show for your smartness?"

Leavitt shakes his head, eyin' him calm.

"What you been doing, anyway?" asks Hicks.

"Why," says Leavitt, "I specialized in chemistry while at college. I've been following that."

"Chemistry!" snorts Hicks. "Never heard there was much in that."

"It is sometimes useful in the industrial arts," says Leavitt.

"I know," says Hicks. "I've hired chemists out at my plant; paid 'em twenty-five a week. I can get any number for that—women chemists for sixteen and eighteen. Just as good too. Lookin' for a job, are you?"

Leavitt don't even flush up. "Thank you, not just now," says he. "I'm taking a rest. But about this drain-pipe business—how did you get into that?"

"By starting work in a brick yard—wheeling clay," says Hicks. "Did that all one hot summer. Then they put me in charge of the firing. Inside of a year I was foreman. Why? Because I lived on the job, stayed with it day and night. I was saving my pay too. The second year I bought in—a third interest. Two years more and I owned the yard,—Hicks' Bricks. Sold 'em everywhere.

"Then I found there was good money in drain pipe. I got hold of a plant over in Jersey that wasn't being run right. Got it cheap. And I'd run across an old German who knew how to turn out glazed stuff. I got together a gang of good workers,—not a loafer in the lot. I picked out the ones that would work cheap and stand for a ten-hour day. Of course the unions tried to make trouble; but I put 'em out of business. Wouldn't let 'em dictate to me how to run my business—not a bit! I put on boys at half wages, and got as much out of 'em as if they were men. That's how I could undersell the other firms and land the big orders.

"The plant grew year by year, and I saved my profits. We lived in a little frame house near the works. I was there every morning before the whistle blew. I kept the force on the jump. Oh, I'm letting up a little now;

but I've got foremen who can get the work out of 'em,—drivers. They got to be, or I've no use for 'em. They know me. Well, that's how it's done. That's what brings in this sort of thing." And he puffs away at his cigar satisfied.

"Now do you think it's odd," demands Hicks, "my making drain pipes?"

"Perhaps I should explain why I said that," says Leavitt. "Let me ask, though, what glazing process you are using now?"

"Same one I've always used," says Hicks. "Why?"

"Haven't tried the Von Lieder method?" asks Leavitt.

"Never heard of it," says Hicks.

"It was adopted by most of the big German potteries and tile works five or six years ago," says Leavitt. "You see, I was over there, when the war knocked the bottom out of things, working as a shop chemist and getting the hang of their ways. A firm in Budapest sent me up. I'd been experimenting on my own hook too, and at last I worked out a process which I think is even better than Von Lieder's."

"Huh!" says Hicks.

"Now, just what does it cost you a cubic yard to glaze your pipe?" asks Leavitt.

"Don't know," says Hicks. "Never figured that fine—never had to."

"Well, on a thousand feet of ten-inch pipe—a rough estimate?" insists Leavitt.

Hicks scratches his head and makes an off-hand guess. Leavitt takes a pencil and does a little arithmetic on the back of an envelope.

"Using my vacuum retort process," says Leavitt, "I can do better than cut that cost in half."

"I—I don't believe it," says Hicks.

"Neither did the Draco people," says Leavitt, "until I set up my demonstration kiln and proved it. Then they were ready to talk business."

"The Consolidated Drain Pipe Company?" says Hicks, perkin' up a bit.

"Business rivals of yours, aren't they?" says Leavitt. "Perhaps you'll be interested then to see the offer they made. I have their letter somewhere. It had just come when I was taken ill. Ah, here it is!"

Hicks he reads it careful, and the deeper into it he gets the more stary-eyed he grows.

"Why, see here, Leavitt!" he gasps. "If—if this is so, then they—they can run me out."

"If they adopt my process," says Leavitt, "they can undersell any firm in the business and still double their profits. I guarantee that. And they offer me two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for it outright."

"But you—you won't sell to them, will you?" pleads Hicks, the sweat startin' from his forehead and his pasty face turnin' blotchy. "Why, they'd break me inside of two months!

Any other time I might have pulled through; but just now—well, you see, I've been chump enough to try to make a splurge; got all my spare capital tied up in—in this. It was this way: We'd been nobodies all our lives, Millie and me. We thought we wanted something grand for a home. Well, we got it. Fifty thousand cash I've put into this place—and during a dull year too! Honest, I haven't made a dollar in six months. Now things are brightening up. There are big contracts about to be let, and if you tie up with the Draco people I—why, Leavitt, I'll be a ruined man! Yes, sir, ruined! McCabe, you talk to him. Just think, we're old friends, went to school together, and here you come and—please, Leavitt!"

"I haven't signed up with them yet," says Leavitt; "though I'd about made up my mind to take what I could get. Really, I should have a share in the profits. We might talk that over, say some day this week."

"Why not now, to-night?" urges Hicks. "You haven't got to go anywhere else, have you? And there's our new guest-room suite! Come, I want you to christen it. We'll make you comfortable here. Besides, I couldn't think of letting you go. What would Mrs. Hicks say—an old friend! And those Draco people are strangers—crooks too; take it from me! We'll fix up a deal together. We'll show 'em a few points!"

Leavitt smiles and nods. "Perhaps," says he.

And when I left Hicks was pattin' him brotherly on the back and pushin' another twenty-five-cent cigar on him.

"Why," says Sadie as I drifts in alone. "What have you done with Sully's Mr. Bob?"

"Leavitt?" says I. "Oh, I left him up with Hick, his dear old chum. I don't know whether he's going to be adopted, or just taken into the firm."

CHAPTER II

GETTING DORA INTO HIGH

"Don't forget," says Sadie that mornin', as I'm about to make a sprint for the eight-three. "You are to pick up Miss Peaslee and her niece and bring them home with you. They're at the Lady Louise, you know."

"Eh!" says I. "Sendin' me to pluck another sample from the Old Maids' Retreat? I hope she ain't one of the giddy kind."

"Miss Ann is an old dear," says Sadie. "You'll say so, too, when you know her."

"Catch me!" says I, grabbin' my hat.

One of Sadie's usual offhand stunts, this was, invitin' out a party she'd met casual up in Vermont last summer. Seems Miss Peaslee had put Sadie on the track of some antique junk—a four-poster bed with pineapple tops, and an overgrown mahogany bureau that she calls a high-boy. The old girl had a houseful of such truck herself. That's how Sadie got to know her. She'd no sooner heard of Miss Peaslee's antiques than she hunts her up, feeds her a good jolly, I expect, and gets shown over the house.

You should have heard her rave afterwards about gate-legged tables and sleigh-bedsteads

and so on. And when Miss Peaslee negotiated this trade for Sadie, and she'd got the stuff refinished and stowed in our east guest-room, Sadie was just bustin' with gratitude. So, when she hears that Miss Ann and her niece are in town, she calls her up and insists on their comin' out to Rockhurst for a week anyway. And me, I'm appointed to round 'em up.

No, I didn't forget. But, as we trails through Grand Central that evenin' to get the five-sixteen, I was wishin' I had. Not that Miss Ann mightn't have looked all right up at Sorrell Center, Vermont, standin' on her front porch, with the white paneled door and the green-shuttered side-lights as a background; but here amongst our swell commuter bunch—well, no wonder I was gettin' the grin right and left.

One of those tall, straight old girls, Miss Ann is, with Baldwin-apple cheeks and gray hair. She's dressed neat and modest, too, in a costume that dates back to about '65, I should say. Anyway, it's a stiff black silk, with a long white jigamaree draped over her shoulders and fastened in front with a cameo pin the size of a fried egg. The jet bonnet with the black velvet chin-straps must have been a curio, too.

Then, there's the niece—a high-colored, big-eyed young thing of eighteen or nineteen. Reg'lar dairy-maid complexion, she had—almost vivid enough, with its streaks of pink and white, to be mistaken for a stage make-up. Nearly as tall and straight as Auntie, Miss

Dora is, only slimmer, and I expect if it hadn't been for the home dressmakin' outfit she wouldn't have looked so bad. But, in that meal-sack skirt and the jacket with the puckered seams, there's no more doubt about her bein' just in from the country than if she'd been labeled.

Add to our line of march a grinnin' porter luggin' an old bag that looked like it had been in the attic since the Centennial, a brand-new extension grip, and a paper parcel done up in a shawl-strap, and you can guess how comic some of them plute brokers must have classed themselves when they tips me the passin' wink.

We had a nice, chatty time on the way out, though, Miss Peaslee and me. She says they've been so much on the go that it'll be sort of restful to get where they can really breathe without havin' to dodge a taxi-cab.

"Been sort of doin' the town, eh?" says I.

She admits they have.

"I expect you've seen all the new chicken shows along Broadway?" says I.

"No," says she; "I never did take much interest in poultry-raising."

"These Broadway chickens raise themselves," says I. "But I guess you've seen enough of 'em at the midnight cabarets and at the trot shops?"

She stares at me puzzled.

"My niece and I," says she, "have been

spending most of our time at the Art and Natural History Museums. We have been studying the Cerollas and Homers. Wonderful, aren't they?"

I didn't deny it. Maybe they are.

"Of course," she goes on, "we have found time, too, to visit Grant's Tomb and the Statue of Liberty and the new Library. Then, on Sundays, we have attended at least two of the more prominent churches. What an intellectual treat Merle St. Croix Wright is! I suppose you hear him often?"

"Eh?" says I, gawpin'. "Well, not so often as you might think."

Called for more or less scientific duckin' on my part, but I wa'n't goin' to let any old girl from Vermont tell me things about New York I'd never heard of. Reg'lar Cook's tourin' they'd been at; takin' in cathedrals, public buildin's, and homes of the wealthy; also historical spots.

"We even found the site where Burr and Hamilton fought," says she.

At which I pricks up my ears.

"Let's see," says I. "That must have been before John L. won the belt. Welter or heavyweights, were they?"

I had her starin' again. "I'm sure I don't know," says she. "But my niece will. Dora, you have the guide-book, haven't you? Find that about the Burr-Hamilton duel."

And, if you'll believe it, this was a shootin'

scrape pulled off over near Fort Lee back in the days of George Washington. Think of diggin' up a ripe old scandal like that!

Seems they'd been doin' all this mainly on Dora's account. She'd finished up at the Academy, and now Auntie was blowin' her to a month's sight-seein' orgy, so her education would be complete. For next fall Dora was slated to tackle a teacher's job back at the Center, and maybe, in the course of fifteen or twenty years, work up to be assistant principal in the Academy.

"A position which I held," says Miss Ann, "for a long period. That is Dora's ambition, too."

"Oh, she'll be gettin' married one of these days," says I, "and that program will be ditched."

Auntie shakes her head.

"I think not," says she. "Dora is an Allen, you know, and our girls are quite apt to become spinsters."

I might have hinted that Dora wouldn't run any risks while she stuck to New York and that costume, but I didn't. I saved it to whisper to Sadie after she'd towed 'em to their rooms. Maybe I chuckled over it a bit, too.

"For shame, Shorty!" says she. "A lot you know about girls, don't you? Now, I think she is real sweet. Of course, the way she's dressed— But if I could have her for a couple of weeks——"

"Bet you," says I, "a set of blue fox against a mink-lined overcoat."

She's a true sport, Sadie. She only stares dreamy for a second.

"I'll take you, Shorty," says she.

And, say, I was all but wearin' that coat from then on. I wouldn't have sold my ticket for ninety per cent. And when I notices the quiet, mouselike ways of Miss Allen at dinner I was surer than ever that, for once, I had a cinch.

It wa'n't that she seemed just plain scared. That was her natural way: sort of dumb—tongue-tied, for all I could tell. Anyway, she hardly took her eyes off her plate, and all Sadie could get out of her was a nod or a "No, ma'am," now and then. Yet, if you took Auntie's word for it, Dora knew a lot. She's been president of her class; had read a piece, all in Latin, that she'd done herself, at the graduating exercises; and could paint water-color sketches that you could almost tell what they was meant for.

"You know, I started out to be an artist," adds Miss Peaslee. "Yes, I was studying in Paris when father's health broke down and he retired from the ministry. Then, of course, I was obliged to return and go to teaching. That is how I earned the money to buy Bald Mountain Farm for the old folks to live on. If only we had known sooner about the marble!"

"Marble?" echoes Sadie.

"Solid," says Miss Peaslee. "The whole

mountain. A very good quality, too. We have quarried tons of it every year since. So, you see, I was able to quit teaching before the Board voted me too old."

"Oh!" says Sadie, smilin' significant across the table at me.

I got the idea. Most likely the marble works would come to Dora. Well, she needed 'em, and more. Course, back in Vermont that might qualify her in the heiress class, but not so near Fifth Avenue as this. I could still get the feel of that mink linin'.

Anyway, Sadie and I was enjoyin' our little joke on the side, and she was mostly in fun about tryin' to wish a steady onto Miss Allen until— Well, things do take queer turns, don't they? Here we was, settin' quiet around the livin'-room fireplace, Sadie and Miss Peaslee chattin' enthusiastic about discovering old mahogany dressers and Hepplewhite chairs stowed away in barns and attics; Miss Dora, she's listenin' polite, with her hands folded proper in her lap; and me, I'm runnin' through the war news in the evenin' papers; when an automobile siren cuts loose outside, the front door-bell is rung violent, and in blows Pinckney with a party of friends. Nothin' special, only he'd been givin' a little dinner party at some gasolene joint up the line, and on the way back he'd taken a notion to drop in on us.

"Charmed, aren't you?" says he to Sadie. "But it turned cold so quickly that the Coun-

tess was getting quite chilled. By the way, Mrs. McCabe, you've met the Countess Zitkoff, haven't you? Yes, I was sure you had. Think of a Russian minding a little frost!"

"Lit-tle!" says the Countess, stretchin' her toes out on the fender. "But I am perished. *Br-r-r-r!* Listen, Mrs. McCabe. Forty miles in an open motor! He is an assassin. See! I shiver in all my bones."

"Meaning," adds Pinckney, with a wink at me, "that the Countess would not look with scorn on a nip of brandy."

It was a good guess. "*Ma foi!*" says she, as I rushes the pain-killer at her. "Cognac! I am rescued!"

Some sizable nip that was she pours out, too. But then, there was such a lot of the Countess to warm up. I've see countesses before that didn't look the part at all. But this one did, believe me. Not the lumpy, squatty kind, but tall as well as wide. A reg'lar whale of an old girl. And in her day I should say she must have been quite a stunner, too.

"Ah-h-h!" says she, handin' back the glass. "If I am ever permitted to return to my dear Petrograd, you must visit me for a year. Only so can I repay. And now——"

Here she dives into a gold mesh bag and produces a ruby-set case full of long, gold-tipped cigarettes; she don't even have to borrow a match.

And just as she's blowin' out the first few

puffs I happens to get a glimpse of Dora, watchin' bug-eyed from the background. Her education was comin' on fast.

About the same time, too, I notices Miss Peaslee.

She'd been introduced, of course, but kind of hasty across the room, and she'd sidled off quiet. Now she's edgin' up, though, for a good look at the Countess. Viewin', the cigarette smokin', I judged. So I'm a little jarred when all of a sudden she marches right up to our sporty guest.

"Why!" says she, sort of gaspy. "It—it's Zara, isn't it? You have probably forgotten me, though—Ann Peaslee."

The Countess Zitkoff poises her bare forearm half-lifted, the cigarette between her fingers, and stares through the smoke-ring.

Only for a minute, though.

"Eh?" says she. "What is that you tell me? Not—not *La Petite Parfait! Mais oui!* It is—Ann! Attend, all of you. From the past she comes to me thus. *Ma chérie!* Ah-h-h-h!"

And before Miss Peaslee can do a duck she's been clinched, her straight cut nose tucked under the Countess's second chin among the pearl ropes, with the Countess's cigarette wavin' just clear of her back hair.

Some grand little reunion that was, take it from me. No great mystery about their knowing each other, either. They'd done the art-

student trick together for a couple of years, got to be great chums, and had finally roomed in the same house, the noble young Russian occupyin' the whole second floor, and the Vermont girl livin' in a six by nine cubby-hole up under the roof.

An odd combination they must have been, too.

"Such an innocent you were—at first," exclaims the Countess. "Drink the *vin ordinaire?* No, no! Or go to the great *bal masque?* Never! Or *fumer la*— But I am stupid. Pardon!"

And what does she do but shove out the gold tips generous.

Miss Peaslee shakes her head. "No, thank you," says she.

"But," urges the Countess, "your favorites. Real Romanoffs, such as my brother used to bring us!"

"I—I've forgotten how," says Miss Ann.

"Perhaps, too," suggests the Countess insinuatin', "you have forgotten Ivan also?"

And, say, if that don't get her all tinted up. We all saw it and passed around the grin.

"Not quite," says she. "I hope he—he is——"

"Ah, poor Ivan!" sighs the Countess. "Wounded, leading his regiment against the Japanese, years ago. He got home, that is all. And now two of his sons are at the front. God knows! Another, the youngest, I have here

with me—an attaché. A dear boy—you must see him. We shall have a dinner-party, just us three."

Miss Peaslee suggests that she couldn't leave her niece.

"What! A niece?" says the Countess. "Ah, one must be careful. These romantic youths, you know. Michel is so much like his father, too. But where is she, this niece?"

So Dora, actin' more dumb and scared than ever, is led out for inspection. The Countess gives her a shrewd, quick glance.

"Oh!" says she. "That one? Then she must come too. We will arrange it, will we not? I have taken a villa. It is not far. Mrs. McCabe will spare you for one evening, eh?"

"To be sure," says Sadie. "But, in return, you and your nephew must dine with us also."

Real cordial she seems about it, too, and pats the Countess friendly on the shoulder. But afterwards, on the side, she lets out to me:

"The absurd old person. As though someone might steal her precious nephew! Didn't you see them together one day, Shorty? What is he like?"

"Why," says I, "he looked to me a good deal like a young Russian gent."

"But how?" insists Sadie. "His hair, his eyes, and so on?"

"Kind of sad hair," says I, "but real pleasant feet."

"Please!" says Sadie. "No vaudeville. I want to know about him."

"Say," says I, "you don't think I store up mental snap-shots of young foreigners I see whizzin' by in limousines, do you?"

I might have guessed, though, from the set of Sadie's chin, that she was plottin' somethin' or other. She couldn't have had much time to frame up anything, for they pulled off that get-together party the very next night. I don't know if it was a success or not. I guess Miss Peaslee had a good time, but I gathered that Miss Dora continued her clam act uninterrupted, and that the romantic Michel got through the evenin' without losin' his heart.

"In fact," adds Sadie, "I'm sure he hardly noticed the girl. The poor thing! In that ridiculous silk waist and with her hair done in that quaint fashion! But I mean to show him. They're coming here Saturday night. I'm going to have a talk with Miss Peaslee about Dora's clothes. It's a shame, with all her money!"

"Huh!" says I. "It'll take the profits from more'n one marble quarry to doll up Dora so she can qualify for anything but the back row."

"You wait!" says Sadie.

Whether she had any trouble inducin' Miss Ann to loosen up or not I don't know, but for the next few days they spent most of the time in town. I'll admit there was quite a change

in Dora, too. She shows up with her hair landscaped different, there's more or less zip to her new hat and street costume, and she's beginning to lift her chin off her wishbone at mealtime. Once or twice she even makes a remark all on her own, and now and then she indulges in a smile that brings out her cheek dimples. For a sample of maple-sugar-and-doughnut-belt queen, she wa'n't so bad. That's about all that could be said, though.

Anyway, I wa'n't on the lookout for anything special from her on the night of the return party at our house. Maybe I was a little fussed myself, gettin' gussied up just right; for we don't have Russian countesses common at dinner,—not even for breakfast,—and I was wonderin' if I should have to tackle carvin' with white gloves on. Then, when they finally arrives, along about seven-thirty, I'm so near starved, my one idea is to shoo 'em in where the nourishment is.

"Don't be in a rush," whispers Sadie. "Do let them get their wraps off. Besides, Dora isn't down yet, and—oh, here she comes!"

"Wha-a-a-at!" I gasps, gettin' a glimpse of the fairy floatin' down the stairs. "Say, you don't mean——"

"Hush!" says Sadie, givin' me the nudge.

Say she'd put it over. You know how they're buildin' some of the new evenin' dresses now —out of steen yards of transparent black net and blamed little else? Sort of an X-ray photo

effect. Well, that was Dora's outfit. And, say, with her slim white neck and her white shoulders, and her dark hair and her big black eyes with the long lashes, and the roses bloomin' in her cheeks—well, maybe I'm no beauty judge, but she had me blinkin', all right. And if young Mr. Sneezowski, or whatever his name was, didn't get any thrill, then he must have been a dead one.

The Countess Zitkoff don't miss any of this presto-change business, at least. She whirls accusin' on Miss Peaslee at once.

"Ann," says she, "what have you been doing with your niece?"

Miss Peaslee smiles sort of satisfied.

"The poor child!" says she. "We have had no time for shopping before, and I had not realized how sadly she needed something to wear."

"Humph!" says the Countess, eyin' her nephew as he promptly comes to life and begins discoverin' that Miss Dora exists.

"Say," I puts in, "couldn't we——"

"Oh, yes," breaks in Sadie, chokin' me off. "Let's go in."

I don't know whether it's part of the campaign or not, but we had the tallest and bushiest bunch of roses for a centerpiece that I'd ever known Sadie to decorate a table with. And on one side is the Countess Zitkoff and Miss Peaslee, while on the other are the young folks. I could see 'em plain enough, of course, and so

could Sadie; but when the Countess wanted a peek she had to do some neck-stretchin'.

And, somehow, Dora and Michel don't seem to mind bein' behind the screen. From the very start, after she'd got over her blushin' fit, Dora acts like a different girl. Chat? Why, inside of five minutes she was givin' him back as good as he sent, and I judged from the admirin' glances the young gent aimed her way that he was lettin' some of his thoughts leak through into his conversation.

Anyway, they had a good time, from the Lynnhavens clear through to the biscuit tortoni. And when Sadie suggests, as the kirsch is bein' served, that they needn't linger if they don't want to, they makes a cheerful exit to the livin'-room. A minute later we could hear Dora unlimberin' her fingers on some classic piano piece.

Meanwhile the Countess has been gettin' more and more restless. She's an old girl that's apt to speak right out, too, anything she happens to have on her mind.

"Ann Peaslee," says she, "you have taken notice, I suppose?" and she nods towards the other room.

"Oh, yes," says Miss Peaslee. "They seem to be enjoying themselves, don't they?"

"But I wish it stopped," announces the Countess.

Miss Ann is one of the cool, calm kind. She

raises her white eyebrows a trifle, and then asks placid: "Do you, Zara?"

"Certainly," says the Countess. "Don't you?"

Miss Peaslee twists the slim little glass in her fingers, gazin' at it thoughtful before she answers.

"You didn't say that," she finally comes back at her, "when Ivan—when your brother came to see me so often, there in the Rue Parnasse."

"Oh, then!" says the Countess, wavin' her cigarette careless. "But you were such an innocent. That was such—such nonsense."

"Was it?" says Miss Peaslee, smilin' quiet. "I didn't know. Ivan said he wanted to marry me."

"He—he did!" gasps the Countess. "Ivan?"

Miss Ann nods. "For two hours one evening he pleaded and urged," she goes on. "He asked me to run off with him. He had made all the arrangements—the civil papers were ready, a priest of his church waiting."

"And you—you would not?" demands the Countess.

Miss Peaslee shakes her head.

"I thought it wouldn't be right," says she. "There was my mother—my father. He was a minister, you know. And they had both scrimped and worked so hard to send me over. Besides, I considered I was too young. I was

nearly twenty then. Dora was twenty last June. And this—this is her first chance to know anyone but country boys."

The Countess Zitkoff shrugs her shoulders impatient.

"You forget, Ann," says she. "My nephew is an Orloff. His father was a general in the imperial army. While your niece——"

"Is an Allen," breaks in Miss Peaslee, liftin' her head and givin' the Countess a quick flash from her clear eyes. "A Green Mountain Allen, and a direct descendant of Colonel Ethan Allen, who captured Fort Ticonderoga from the British in the name of Jehovah and the Continental Congress."

Think of havin' a chunk of hist'ry like that chucked at you across a demi-tasse!

And, believe me, the way she hands it out, it listens some impressive, too. The Countess might have been posted on the Revolution, or she might not, but she couldn't help gettin' the idea that Miss Dora was no four-flusher when it came to ancestors. And that seems to figure with the old girl.

"Ah!" says she. "A soldier too? A hero, perhaps?"

Miss Peaslee springs that quiet smile of hers again. She unfastens a heavy silver pin from her waist and passes it over.

"A facsimile of one of the Ethan Allen monuments," says she. "Ugly enough, isn't it? I wear it sometimes, however. You see,

my mother was an Allen, too. And that time when I told her about Ivan—how good and how handsome he was, and how much I—I thought of him—I think she was sorry for me. As for Dora, I hardly thought anything of the kind would ever come to her. If it should, I trust I may be near. But, of course, if you object to those young people getting better acquainted——"

"I am a silly old woman," breaks in the Countess. "Pouff! It is nothing, after all. And your Dora—ah, I must make the joke: she is *adorable.* So were you, *La Petite Parfait.* And my poor Ivan did not make so good a choice in the end. Perhaps if you had said yes— Well, who knows? Listen! Michel is singing."

So he was—some Romeo song or other; and doin' it fairly well, too. Which wa'n't such slow work, either for him or Dora, was it?

No, nothin' definite yet, only Miss Peaslee and her niece have settled down in New York for the winter, with Sorrell Center crossed off the map.

And me? I'm gettin' a line on the price of blue fox furs.

CHAPTER III

BACKING BAXY IN A SPLIT

I EXPECT I should have breezed right by and not noticed him at all. But when you see one of your reg'lars sittin' humped over in a railroad waitin'-room, starin' troubled at the floor and blowin' absent-minded through his fingers, it's only human, ain't it, to stop and ask whether someone's violated his neutrality, or if he has a pain somewhere?

Besides, the Baxter Prices are neighbors of ours, in a way, livin' down on the Point not more'n a couple of miles from us; and Sadie's been more or less interested in 'em for quite a spell. So I pulls up just opposite the newsstand and walks back to where this husky, moon-faced young gent is givin' a public exhibit of mental distress.

"Is it as bad as you advertise," says I, "or worse?"

He lifts his head lifeless and gazes at me sort of vague and puzzled.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Shorty?" says he. "What—what's the time?"

"Judgin' by the clock just over your head," says I, "it's goin' on for five-thirty."

At which he lets out a groan and blows

through first one hand and then the other—a nutty little trick of his that I'd noticed before. He makes a kind of funnel out of his fingers, thumb up, and breathes through 'em hard, like he was tryin' to muffle his exhaust.

"Only six minutes more," says he. "Six minutes! Good heavens!"

"Fine!" says I. "You listen as tragic as you look. If it's something you're enjoyin' all by yourself, though, perhaps I'd better be——"

"No, no!" he breaks in. "Don't go away and leave me like this, McCabe. Don't! I'll tell you all. Why not? By to-morrow the whole world will know."

"Eh?" says I, gawpin' at him.

"It's about Marje and me," says he. "We—we've gone our ways."

"You've what?" says I. "Bust up, you mean?"

He nods. "Absolutely," says he. "Forever."

I whistles. Course, it's common enough in 'most any set, this makin' a slip-noose of the hymeneal knot; but you don't often get right up against it. And, while I'd never had any inside views of their affairs, I'd always classed the Baxter Prices among the permanent lovey-doveys. Why, they'd seemed chummy enough, floatin' around together. You never can tell, though, can you? Such a pity, too, with their swell little place and all!

"Well, well!" says I. "Come kind of sudden, didn't it?"

"We've been drifting apart," says he, "for months. I've seen it."

"But the final smash?" says I.

"This afternoon," says he.

He announces it gloomy and solemn, which is only proper, I expect. But then, Baxter is always bein' gloomy about something or other; or else he's just the opposite, treadin' on air and chucklin' over nothin' at all. An odd mixture.

"I suppose Mrs. Price has—er—left home to go to mother, eh?" I suggests.

"No," says he. "I've just left for—for mine."

"Huh!" says I. "Quit first, did you?"

"I thought it would be easier for Marjorie," says he. "You see, her folks are out on the Coast this summer. It would be a long, hot trip. Besides, she's entered for the Ladies' Metropolitan series, and I understand she's playing her best golf—splendid form, for her. Then there's another thing. She's just got her old cook back, the one that makes such wonderful waffles. And so— Well, you understand?"

"Oh, sure!" says I. "You're willin' to separate her from anything but her waffles."

"We-e-ell," says he, "Marje is very fond of waffles, you know. Then I thought, too, that nothing need come out for a while; she could

say I'd gone on a business trip—anything! But now——"

A bell starts ringin,' and out from the wall back of us booms a canned megaphone voice:

"Train num-ber For-ty-five—Chi-ca-go Lim-i-ted. Track Nine-teen. Chi-ca-go Lim-i-ted!"

Baxter jumps up. "There she is!" he gasps husky.

"Who?" says I. "Mrs. Price?"

"No," he says. "It's that meddlesome old relative of hers, Aunt Linnie. I—I've got to meet her."

"In that case," says I, "excuse me."

"Please, Shorty," says he, grabbin' me by the sleeve. "I—I'm too much unstrung to face her alone. You see, I'm sure she suspects that something is wrong; some of Marjorie's folks must have sent word to her. She—she's always called in at such times, I understand."

"Sort of an Old Lady Fix-it, eh?" I says.

"Exactly," says he. "I've heard a lot about Aunt Linnie, although I've seen her only once—for just a moment, at our wedding reception. But you can imagine that sort of person. She's past sixty, and rheumatic—gets around in a wheel-chair. That's why I had to wait and take her home. Marjorie is over at Short Hills, I think. Anyway, she's in the semi-finals, second flight. One of the morning papers had her picture on the sporting page to-day. Fancy that! So, when the telegram

came that Aunt Linnie would arrive on this train, I simply had to meet it and get her out there. I sha'n't mind so much, once she's in the house. And if you go along, you know, she'll not dare open up on me. You see how it is! Come, McCabe—as a friend, now?"

He has a winnin' way with him, at times—more like a big, overgrown kid teasin' you to do something. Then, there's that helpless, pleadin' look in his eyes. They come mighty near bein' what you'd call pop-eyes, and as a rule they're kind of starey and wanderin', as if he was seein' things beyond you and over your head; but when he steadies 'em down they're different—friendly and chummy, you know. Anyway, I falls for the help-wanted signal.

"Baxter," says I, "anybody who wouldn't stand by a friend threatened by his wife's aunt ought to be shot at sunrise. I'll stay."

So we hustles along to the gate of Track Nineteen, gets in line with the rest of the reception committee, and braces ourselves for the worst. Which shows just how foolish a stunt you can let yourself in for by not payin' strict attention to your own affairs. Here I am actin' as body-guard to a 180-pound husk who's been votin' ever since the Subway was opened. He's about the last one, too, I'd ever expect to get such a hail from.

But he's made up queer—Baxter. One of these sluggish-movin', slow-spoken gents who

generally acts like he was walkin' in his sleep. Yet I hear he's general manager of a big concern downtown—some Standard Oil side line with half a dozen smelly factories over in Jersey. And the S. O. people don't have somnambulists on their staff as a rule, you know.

"That must be Aunt Linnie," says he, nudgin' me and pointin' down to the end of the line, where a red-capped porter is pushin' a wheel-chair along.

Course, what I'm expectin' is a hatchet-faced old dame with corkscrew curls and a funny lid. But this placid-faced old party in the gray dust-coat and the perky little lavender bonnet seems to be beamin' around mild and friendly, as if she might be real folksy with half a chance.

"Must be one of the smooth kind," I whispers to Baxter.

"I've no doubt she is," says he, and steps out to claim her.

She comes right back at him, too, with the pleasant greetin'.

"Gra-shus!" says she, holdin' on to his hand and pattin' it. "I wasn't looking for you here, or you wouldn't have caught me being pushed around like a sack of flour. I'm not really such a cripple as all this! But John would insist on wiring ahead for a chair to meet me. How big and distinguished you look, Baxter!"

Nothing real savage about that! In fact,

there's a mild, gentle look on her deep-lined old face that couldn't very well be just put on. She talks sort of deliberate, and with a catchy little break to her voice that's kind of comic.

"How is Marjorie?" she goes on.

"She—she's all right, I guess," says Baxter, a bit fussed. "She'll be a little late getting home to-night, I think. I—that is—we'll take you out. My friend, Professor McCabe."

"Oh!" says Auntie. "A professor?"

"Of boxing," adds Baxter.

"Gra-shus!" says Auntie, lookin' me over curious, but shakin' hands cordial.

Well, we had her wheeled around to the local and loaded her in. On the trip out she never mentions fam'ly troubles, but gives us an entertainin' account of her last six weeks' stay at some mud-bath sanitarium, and hints how she was just startin' to visit a friend up in the mountains when she got this note from John's wife suggestin' that she ought to stop off and see Marjorie for a while first.

"Huh!" grunts Baxter. "John's wife, eh?"

"Yes," says Aunt Linnie, foldin' her hands placid.

There's a twinkle in her eye that Baxter don't seem to see, for he keeps on gettin' nervous and restless, and starts blowin' through his fingers again. He don't say another word, though, until we gets to the house. Then, the first thing he does is to pike into the

dinin'-room and grab a decanter off the sideboard. Aunt Linnie stands watchin' him through the door.

"Hope you don't mind," says he. "My nerves, you know."

"Not at all," says Auntie. "I'll take a little hot water and sugar with mine."

And, say, the minute I saw her start stirrin' up that toddy I begun to suspicion she was a good old sport. Baxter, the boob, though, can't seem to think of anything but his own troubles.

"It's no good, you know, Jane's sending you here now," he breaks out. "Things have gone too far. I'm sorry, Aunt Linnie, but this is one affair you can't straighten out."

She stares at him innocent and astonished.

"What!" says she. "Me straighten anything? Why, that's just plain foolish. I never could keep my own affairs untangled, and as for other folks'—lawzee me!"

"But you came here because you thought you could patch things up between Marjorie and me, didn't you?" he demands.

She's a cool, steady old girl. She knew when she'd been caught with the goods on. But she never bats an eye.

"If I did," says she, "I've changed my mind. In fact, I never was much in favor of patching things up. If two young people find they can't live happily together they ought to quit trying, and the sooner the better."

Baxter gasps. "Precisely what I decided this afternoon," says he. "It's been simply awful."

"I don't doubt it a bit," agrees Aunt Linnie, fishin' for the last bit of sugar in the bottom of her glass.

"We—we've barely spoken to each other for a week," he goes on.

"I don't blame you—either of you," says she enthusiastic.

"Eh?" says Baxter, his eyes poppin'.

"You've each seen a lawyer, I suppose?" says Auntie.

"Why—er—not yet," says he. "You see, I'd only just made up my mind that——"

"If I were you," says she, "I would bring suit at once; and put down in writing all the mean, horrid things she has said and done to you, before you forget any. Get them all in. There is a lot of satisfaction in telling such things to a lawyer. You are going to turn her out of the house, of course."

"Why, no," says Baxter, actin' sort of dazed. "I—I was leaving myself. I had my things all packed when——"

"That is the next best thing," breaks in Auntie. "Leave her. And I presume you have written a note denouncing her for a cruel, treacherous, wicked woman?"

"Wha-a-at?" gasps Baxter. "See here, Aunt Linnie, you're speaking of my wife, you know."

"And my niece, Baxter," she fires back at him.

"But she's neither wicked nor cruel nor treacherous," he insists.

Aunt Linnie glances over at me and shrugs her shoulders. Maybe she winked.

"Oh, very well," says she. "Of course, I've seen very little of her since she was a slip of a girl. I suppose, then, it's on account of her vicious temper?"

"Temper!" says Baxter. "Marje! Nothing of the sort. It's merely that we're not congenial; that we—well, we don't get along. We squabble, sulk, nag at each other. Oh, it's been something terrible! I can't stand it, that's all. And I'm going to clear out. I'm going now—forever."

"Naturally. Just what you should do," chimes in Aunt Linnie. "Don't endure it for another moment. That is, you might stay long enough to see that dinner has been ordered."

"Dinner will be served at seven, as usual," says Baxter, stiffenin'. "The servants know nothing of this, not a word. I'll simply take my bag and——"

"Who packed it, Baxter?" says she.

"Why, I did, of course" says he.

"Humph!" says she. "Sure you have everything you need until Marjorie sends your trunks? Your pajamas, evening clothes, studs for your dress-shirt——"

"By George!" says Baxter, openin' the kit-

bag and pawin' through it panicky. "I—I believe I did forget those blamed studs, after all. I think Marje keeps them in her jewel-case."

"Better make a note of the studs," says Aunt Linnie. "Then, there are your shaving things —soap, mirror, strop——"

"Hang that razor-strop!" cuts in Baxter. "If I haven't left it on the hook in the bath-room!"

"One can't go away forever," says Aunt Linnie, rollin' her eyes tragic, "without one's razor-strop. Now, how about shoes?"

With my help, he'd just discovered that he'd packed two left pumps, when the front door opens sudden, and in blows the other half of this domestic sketch.

She's a plump, high-colored little party, Mrs. Baxter Price, got up snappy in a pongee golf suit with a half-masted skirt, green-and-white side-laced boots, and one of these freak lids that looks like a puddin'-mold exploding through the top.

Her big, lively eyes opens a bit wider at sight of me and Baxter on our knees in the middle of the livin'-room rug, with the kit-bag between us, and Aunt Linnie holdin' a dress-shirt in one hand and a pair of shoes in the other.

"How interesting!" says she. "May I ask what this is all about?"

Aunt Linnie she just smiles and waves at Baxter. I expect I only gawps. As for Mr.

Price, he tries to look cold and dignified, but it ain't much of a success. Maybe he'd done better if he was standin' up.

"Aunt Linnie, what is going on here?" demands Mrs. Price.

"My dear," says Auntie, "why not ask your husband?"

"Oh, Baxter!" says she. "It would take him a week to explain anything. Besides, he's grouchy about something or other. Mr. McCabe, you seem to be helping. Why the traveling-bag?"

"Tell her," says Baxter.

Nice job, wa'n't it! Like breakin' the news to a new-made widow. But I states the proposition as gentle as I could.

"It's a case of his goin' his way and lettin' you go yours," says I.

"Forever," adds Baxter solemn.

"Pooh!" says Mrs. Price. "Is that all? I was afraid someone had been taken ill."

"Marjorie," calls out Baxter, gettin' on his feet and glarin' at her, "don't you dare be frivolous at such a crisis. I tell you that I——"

"Big baby!" says Mrs. Price, pokin' her finger at him. "Now, I am going to tell Aunt Linnie and Mr. McCabe just what is the matter with you."

"Marjorie!" he warns her.

"I will," says she, runnin' out her tongue. "It's all because I dozed off the other night

while he was reading a lot of reviews of that book of poems he's got out."

"Poems!" echoes Aunt Linnie. "Does Baxter——"

"He does," says Mrs. Price. "He's been at it ever since he was a boy. I've tried to keep it quiet, but I'm not going to any longer. He is Rowland Rice."

"Really!" says Auntie. "Why, not the one who——"

"Uh-huh," says Marjorie. "Those sweet, slushy things, mostly in the women's magazines, fashion periodicals, and so on. That was bad enough. But when he paid three hundred dollars to have them published in a book,—a white-and-gold book,—and expected me to listen to them all over again, and those silly reviews as well——"

"Now, see here!" breaks in Baxter. "Don't I have to listen while you tell me all about your golf matches?"

"Why not?" says Mrs. Price. "That's different."

"Is it?" growls Baxter. "Remember, Aunt Linnie, I'm not a golfer—don't know one stick from another. But all through dinner, night after night, I must hear how she played each stroke; how she sliced into the rough off the first, got bunkered on third, holed out with a mashie approach on the twelfth, and laid her opponent a stymie that won the game on the home green. That sort of thing, by George!"

"But you never half listen," protests Marjorie.

"At least," comes back Mr. Price, "I don't go to sleep."

"As if I could help it that once," pouts Marjorie. "After I'd been thirty-six holes, too. Just think, Aunt Linnie—a whole batch of reviews at once!"

Aunt Linnie sighs and shakes her head.

"I'm afraid it's hopeless," says she. "But I don't know just what to advise. Of course, you might each bring suit and see which would win. I suppose either of you could claim cruel and unusual treatment. The courts here might grant a decree on those grounds, but I doubt it. It would be much simpler for one of you to go to some place like South Dakota. Now, if Baxter could leave his business long enough to——"

"He could not," says Mrs. Price, decided. "He has already had his vacation. We took a motor tour."

"Then you must go, Marjorie," says Aunt Linnie. "You might like it out there and——"

"I sha'n't go a step," announces Marjorie. "I'm not going to divorce Baxter. I think it's horrid, being divorced. It would get in the papers. And it—it would put me off my game, thinking about it. Besides, for all Baxter's such a silly, I—I've got used to having him around."

"But," says Aunt Linnie, "if you no longer love each other——"

"We do, though; we do!" protests Marjorie. "Don't we, Baxy dear?"

With that she makes a sudden rush at him, gives him the fond tackle around the belt, and snuggles her head against his vest, regardless of the puddin'-mold lid.

As for Baxter, after one sheepish glance at us, he folds her in tender.

"I guess we do, after all," says he.

"Gra-shus, not to say allemanastrous!" says Aunt Linnie, tippin' me the humorous wink. "In that case——"

"I beg pardon, ma'am," says a neat maid, edgin' in shy, "but dinner is served, ma'am."

"Thank goodness for that," says Marjorie, pattin' her hubby on the cheek. "I'm nearly starved. Come on, everybody! No, wait a minute. Just to show how good I'm going to be, Baxy— Here! Give me a match."

At which she produces a golf score, touches it off, and throws it into the fireplace.

Does that get Baxter? It does. This time it's him starts the clinch.

"I guess I can make a burnt offering too," says he.

And what he adds to the blaze is a bunch of them precious book reviews that he digs out of his bag. We forms a touchin' little group, I expect, as we stands round the grate.

"Well," says I, breakin' the silence, "it

ain't every fam'ly scrap you can end with a bonfire."

"Maybe more of them could be ended that way," says Aunt Linnie, "if folks could only get together and find out what to burn."

"We knew—eh, Marje?" says Baxter, waggin' his head cocky and leadin' wifey towards the soup.

But, say, I got a hunch that, spite of all her pretendin' she was no fixer, it was Aunt Linnie who really split the kindlin'.

CHAPTER IV

HUB DUCKS THE FLIVVER CLASS

It's well enough sayin' how you're goin' to treat everyone alike durin' business hours—playin' no favorites and ditchin' any private grouches. But it can't be done. Anyway, I can't run the Physical Culture Studio that way. Not reg'lar. There's some blows in here that I take to right from the first tap of the bell. Then again there's others that gets my short hair bristlin' just by the way they opens the door.

Take Struble, now. I'd never had so much as a glimpse of one side of him until, one muggy afternoon last August, he puffs into the front office fannin' himself with his Panama and moppin' his brow. With the humidity up in the nineties, it wa'n't any day for a fat man to go waddlin' around town—not with such a load of soft, flabby excess as he carries.

He stops in the middle of the floor to get his breath, glances critical around the room, and then demands puffy:

"This Shorty McCabe's?"

"It says Professor on the door, don't it?" says I.

"Eh? Oh, does it?" says he, starin' back

stupid at the ground-glass. "So it does! Well, are you the Professor?"

"Uh-huh," says I, sizin' him up a bit hostile, I expect.

He's a squash-face, for one thing. You know —with one of those vacant, untinted maps that has just about as much color and expression as a prize pie fruit in a quick-lunch window. Maybe it's punkin I'm thinkin' of. Anyway, he has a wide, smooth countenance of no particular shade, hair and eyes to match, and a silly double-chin dimple that it's a wonder some careless barber ain't eliminated long before this.

"Struble's my name," says he. "H. K."

"Struble's Soaps?" says I.

"Yes, sir," says he, a trifle chesty.

"I've seen the billboard ads," says I.

"Should hope you had," says he. "I spend a hundred thousand a year on 'em. Bet you've used the soap, too."

"That's right," says I. "Sometimes in hotels and railroad wash-rooms you can't get anything else. Pardon me if I seem to hint that it's perfectly punk stuff."

"Maybe so," says he. "But we make the sales, just the same. That hundred thousand comes back a good many times in the course of a year. That's what I'm in business for."

"I could guess that," says I. "Much obliged for your droppin' in, but I'm stocked 'way up on soap."

He gives me a blank, injured stare, sort of like a cow that's run unexpected into a wire fence.

"See here," says he, "I'm not selling any soap. That's not what I hunted you up for."

"My mistake," says I. "Do I have another guess?"

I don't. He announces that he's come to have me put him in shape. "I'm a little overweight," says he, "and I need fixing up generally. What I want you to do is to work off forty or fifty pounds of this, get me so I can breathe easier, and put some snap into me. I want to sleep better and enjoy my meals more. I'll give you a month to show what you can do."

"Huh!" says I, eyin' him cold. "That's some contract."

"I can pay for it," says Mr. Struble, pattin' his check-book pocket. "So get busy."

I expect you know the Struble type. They're common enough. They ain't all soap magnates, either. A six or seven figure bank balance seems to affect 'em that way. When they want something they go into the market after it, whether it's an old master or a new wife; and they expect the sales-persons to hop around lively. Struble, he was condescendin' to give me an order for about a thousand dollars' worth of health.

Course, I could see he didn't mean to be specially raw about it. Just his way.

"Sorry," says I, "but my class of fatty degenerates is full."

You'd 'most thought that would have jolted him, wouldn't you? But say, he's got a head like a billiard cushion—everything caroms off.

"Class!" says he. "I don't want to go into any class. A private course is what I want."

I shakes my head. "Try golf," says I.

"Bah!" says he. "Haven't I been at that fool game all summer? That is, as long as I could stand it. The lessons wa'n't so bad; I was paying for them. And when that thick-headed Scot couldn't show me how to do it, why, that was up to him. When it came to playing, though—" He groans dismal.

"Why, I thought even the dubs enjoyed it," says I.

"I didn't," says he. "Maybe I might if—Say, what do you think? The only man in my club that I could get to go out with me was an old wreck who was near eighty and had had two strokes. I suppose I do play pretty bad, but is that any reason why I should be treated as if I had smallpox? Three hundred members, and only one would be seen on the course with me. Think of that! I couldn't believe it at first. Not until I'd asked nearly half of 'em. Then I broke my clubs and quit. Resigned, too. Blast 'em! Golf snobs, that's what they are. I'd like to get even with the whole lot some way. But don't talk golf to me. I'll take my exercise in private, where I won't be snubbed

or snickered at. That's why I came to you. Now name your price."

Honest, I did everything but lead him out to the stair landin' and throw him down. Hints! You might as well shoot hot doughtnuts at a dreadnought. Why, I near went hoarse tryin' to convince him I didn't care to take him on at all. He knew what he wanted, knew he could pay, and wouldn't listen to anything else. My little whims on the subject, whatever they might be, didn't interest him at all. He insists on being shown through the gym., havin' the apparatus explained to him; and, the first thing I know, I've assigned him a locker and marked down his time for three afternoons a week.

"You needn't look for any fancy calisthenics, though," says I. "A case like yours calls for rough work, so don't beef at what I put you through."

"I understand," says he. "To-morrow at 3 P.M."

Say, he was game, all right. I had him tossin' the medicine-ball until he leaked like a sprinklin' cart; made him work the rowin'-machine as long as he could stay in the seat; and then stood him in the needle spray while Swifty Joe played the hose on him. We pared him down fifteen pounds that first week, and if there was a muscle on him that wa'n't as sore as a boil it was an oversight on our part.

But back he comes for more every trip, satisfied that he's gettin' his money's worth, and

actually showin' a little face color from it. After each session, too, he likes to sit around the office a while and tell what a whale of a success he's made of the soap business.

That seems to be his one line of conversation —the only thing he knows, in fact. First off it gave me an earache, then it got to be sort of amusin', and after a spell I worked up more or less interest in the tale. Also I was a little curious. How was it, anyway, that such a plain bonehead as Struble, in a country as full of live wires as ours, could go out and connect with so much kale? Oh, he had it! You can't build a four-story cut-granite mansion, with a hundred-foot Riverside Drive frontage, just on hot air. So one day I puts it to him flat.

"Struble," says I, "how in blazes did you ever break into the plute class? Where'd you get your start?"

And he comes back enthusiastic with the details. Seems that twenty-odd years ago he'd been foreman of a dinky little soap factory over on the edge of Jersey City. And when the boss died, him and the widow got together and figured out a scheme for keepin' the business runnin'. Somehow or other they did it. And inside of a year, what with sittin' up with her so many evenin's over the books, they'd got real chummy. Next he knew he'd married her and had the outfit in his own name.

He was makin' a pretty fair article of soap, too; good, honest stuff anyway, that would take

off the dirt. And he was squeezin' out a decent livin' at it. Then, one day, this Hicks gent shows up. He's a promoter with a little capital and a lot of nerve. Hicks gets Struble backed into a corner of the office, feeds him the first real Havana perfecto he'd ever stuck a tooth into, and springs his proposition. He wants to buy in, mortgage the plant up to the eaves, and invest the proceeds in a premium advertisin' scheme. You know, one of these "save-the-wrapper" games. Struble turned pale and gasped. The mere thought of takin' a risk like that left him weak in the knees. He admits it. But Hicks was a persuadin' guy. He could pump sportin' blood into a dill pickle. And by noon next day Struble had signed off a half-interest and the thing was under way.

"I wouldn't go through it again for worlds," says Struble. "The strain of those first six months! Why, we had to pay out our last hundred dollars, sometimes our last five, on those ad contracts—thousands at a whack. Then the premiums: we bought cheap china sets by the carload, gilt clocks and parlor organs by the gross; all sorts of junk, just to give away. Seemed like pouring money down the sewer. And us kiting checks to meet our pay-roll! Makes me shiver to think of it. Why, the least bad turn would have broken us there, many a time—perhaps sent us both to jail.

"And then—well, then we began to get it back. Orders, dribbling along at first, then

steadier, bigger; and at last a stream of them. Rush orders, too. We were nearly swamped with 'em. Couldn't get our base fats, not half fast enough. 'Substitute,' says Hicks. 'Chuck in anything.' 'But it won't be good soap,' says I. 'They won't know the difference, nor care,' says he. 'They're after the premiums.'

"Well, he was right. The cheaper we made the soap, the more we had left for ads; and the more we threw into advertising, the more soap we sold. 'That's the dear American public,' says Hicks. 'Show 'em a chance to get something for nothing and they'll buy themselves poor—and us rich.'

"They did, too. You've seen our factories, eh? The buildings alone cover twelve acres. Three thousand hands, counting day and night shifts. All cheap labor, too. That's what counts—girls in the packing-room, boys in the box-shop, Poles and Italians running the reducers. Such people don't need much to live on. Besides, we're not making fancy goods. Profits are what we're after. We get 'em, too. Look at last year. Bad, eh? But it didn't affect our sales. Jumped 'em, in fact. And we cut our melon just the same."

At which Struble wags his head and poses chesty for me to come across with the admirin' gaze. I had to grin, too. So here was a sample of what we reward with homes on Riverside Drive, and limousines, and English butlers? We're a great nation.

Me bein' one of the common people, I grins. Smart guy, this Mr. Struble. He knows how to put it over us. 'At-a-boy! He's got the coin to prove it.

"Well," says I, "you can take it easy enough now. Have things pretty soft, eh?"

"Yes," says he. "We're livin' up among the swells, right with the best of 'em. Seemed sort of odd at first. Does yet. But I guess we'll get used to it. Sort of lonesome at times, though."

"No young folks comin' on to help you enjoy it?" I asks.

Struble's big moon face clouds up and a starey look settles in his wide-set eyes. "There's only Junior," says he, "and he—well, I'm a little disappointed in him."

"Don't he take kindly to the soap business?" says I.

"I didn't want him to go into that," says Struble.

"I see," says I. "Sent him to college, did you?"

Struble nods. "I tried," says he. "I wanted him to be a lawyer, or something like that. I—I guess he did his best, too; but he couldn't seem to make it."

"Didn't fire him, did they?" says I.

Struble sighs. "Not exactly," says he. "But after he'd been a freshman two terms without making any progress—well, he didn't want to keep on. I'd sort of got discouraged,

too—and after all I'd done. Why, he had everything he wanted—fine rooms, racing car, Jap valet. There wasn't a boy in college had more. But he just couldn't seem to stick to his books. I don't know why."

"I've heard of just such cases," says I. "And sometimes it's the young hick with the fastest roadster that studies slowest. Odd, ain't it?"

Struble gives me one of his stupid stares, indicatin' that he don't get the connection.

"Didn't hit the sportin' life too hard, did he?" I suggests.

"What, Junior?" says Struble. "No, he's a good boy, you know. Not a bit wild. He felt as badly about failing as we did—his mother and I. But there was no use going on. I had a straight talk with him. He'd have gone into the factory if I had insisted. But I didn't want him there. Not yet, anyway. I wanted him to make good on his own hook, like I did. So I got him a place with a firm of brokers; nice, clean business. But he didn't take to that, either. No head for figures. I found another job for him, with a big machinery company, down at Perth Amboy. Took away his allowance this time, too. He's down there now. His mother makes a fuss; says he'll get sick, maybe starve. But if he's going to be a rank failure I want to know it. He understands. This is his last chance. If he comes home this time— Oh, I'll take care of him, but that's all.

Put him on a pension, you know, and sort of count him out."

"Heard how he's getting on?" says I.

"Not lately," says Struble. "Not for a month or so. I—I suppose he will be showing up soon. Then I'll know he's no good. It—it's kind of tough, McCabe, with only one."

"Oh, maybe he won't turn out a flivver, after all," says I.

Struble sighs deep. "I wish I could think so," says he, "but——"

Just then the front office door opens brisk and in breezes a square-shouldered, heavy-treadin' gent in a stream-line frock-coat and knife-blade pants.

"Hello!" says he. "Hub around?"

"Yep," says I. "Around the axle, as usual, just inside the spokes."

"Don't," says he. "This is my busy day. I mean Struble."

"Eh?" says I. "Why, this is Mr. Struble here;" and I points to H. K.

The stranger takes one glance and laughs. "That's funny," says he. "Odd name, too. But it's Hub Struble I'm looking for."

The soap magnate gazes at him puzzled, and it looked like a deadlock until the new arrival begins to explain.

"Malloy's my name," says he. "I'm with the General Sports Company; assistant manager. And I've been trailing this young Struble for three days. Had word he was

working at Perth Amboy, but found they'd let him go three weeks ago."

I glances over at Struble, and he blinks pathetic at me.

"They gave me two addresses," says Malloy. "I tackled the downtown one first, a big office building, and some clerk steered me up here. You don't know him, eh? Then I'll try the other number, around on Sixth Avenue."

"Wait," says Struble. "Is—is it something he owes?"

"Owes!" says Malloy. "Say, what's that to you?"

"Not much," says Struble; "only—well, I'm his father, you see."

"Wha-a-at!" says the assistant manager. "Hub Struble's father, are you? Well, say, I don't need to tell you that you've got some boy there. Yes, yes."

Struble he just blinks and waits for Malloy to go on—which he does.

"We've had our eye on him," says he, "ever since he made such a showing in the Junior Met. Then, when he waded through to the semi-finals in the open—well, we knew he was a comer. And those are the ones that can handle our goods best, the ones that are getting the limelight. See?"

We didn't, either of us.

"I—don't quite understand," says Struble. "Just what is it my boy has done?"

Which was where Malloy got his jolt.

"Say, you don't mean to tell me," says he, "that you don't know Hub Struble's golf record? Why, if he'd sunk a six-foot putt on the eighteenth he'd stood a good show of pulling down the open championship! Say, his drives are the sweetest wooden club work you ever saw; two-seventy-five, as a rule, straight on the pin, with a swing as easy and graceful as a toe-dancer waving a silk scarf. What he can't do with a mashie, too! Why that youngster'll be making Travis look like a beginner one of these days. Don't you read the golf news in the papers?"

Struble acts kind of dazed.

"No," says he. "Of course, I knew he played rather a good game. Brought home a cup last year, I remember, from some college tournament. But he never talked much about it. You see, I'm such a duffer myself that I expect he didn't feel like mentioning golf to me. But you—you think Junior is likely to be good at it?"

"He's our pick of the young amateurs," says Malloy, "and I'm betting that inside of a year, if he plays the open dates, he'll be one of the best known golfers in the country. Physique, form, temperament—he's got 'em all. Why, there at Detroit I saw him make a hundred-yard mashie pitch to a green with a gallery standing twenty deep behind the ropes and a battery of camera men almost at his elbow; and he went at it as steady as if he'd been prac-

ticing out behind the club-house. That's tournament nerve for you! His first play before a big crowd, too, I hear. Oh, he'll come through. You watch!"

"Suppose he does," asks Struble. "What is there in it—playing golf?"

"Playing par golf," corrects Malloy, "is a profession, and a mighty good one if it's worked right. For instance, there's a twenty-five-hundred-dollar job waiting for him with us, and he goes and comes about as he pleases. Then they'll be naming irons and golf balls after him, for a good bonus. The magazines'll be wanting articles from him. Resort hotels will send him invitations. Millionaires will take him along in their private cars and give him market tips in exchange for advice on how to cure a slice. Oh, it pays, all right! But what's he doing in a cheap rooming joint over on Sixth Avenue? That's what I'd like to know."

"I think that interests me some, too," says Struble. "McCabe, suppose you go along with us. It isn't far. Besides, you know about him."

So the three of us goes scoutin' up Sixth Avenue until we comes to this furnished room place over an Italian caterer's. The maid that answers our ring directs us to the back hall room up two flights.

"Come," says a listless voice on the other side of the door, and Struble swings it open.

And there, sittin' with his chin in his hands on a rickety cot-bed, is this husky-built heir to the soap works. Nice, pleasant-faced youth he is, too, with light wavy hair, placid blue eyes set almost as wide as H. K.'s, and a good, clear complexion.

"Oh!" says he, glancin' up and turnin' pink in the ears. "It's you, is it, Dad?"

"Hubert," says Struble, clearin' his throat, "why didn't you come home?"

"I couldn't," says the boy. "I—I hadn't made good. It isn't in me, I guess. I've been trying again, here in town. It's no use. I—I'm sorry, Dad."

"They tell me you're quite a golfer," says Struble.

"That's the trouble," says Hub. "I only asked for ten days or so off for the tournament, and they gave me the chuck."

"You did well though, I'm told," says Struble. "You've gotten to be a crack, eh?"

"Oh, I can shoot it a little at times," says Hubert. "But what's the good? Why, I can't earn enough to pay caddie fees."

"Perhaps I can fix that," says Mr. Malloy, pushin' to the front. "Remember me, don't you? I'm with the General Sports. I was talking to you at Detroit."

He gets straight to business, Malloy does; and inside of half an hour young Mr. Struble has signed a two years' contract and has a five hundred advance check in his fist.

Old H. K. he watches the proceedin's pop-eyed and gaspy. "Well, well!" says he. "Why, I was twice your age before I ever had half that much. Now I guess we can go home and talk to mother; eh, Hubert?"

Say, do you keep the run of these golf meets? I never used to, but since I got to know Hub Struble I've sort of followed what he's been doing. He's down in the long-leaf pine belt now, I see, shootin' some of them Southern courses in the seventies. Then here the other day, in a picture section, I runs across a big half-tone showin' him playin' off the finals—Asheville or Pinehurst or somewhere. And loomin' up prominent in the front edge of the crowd of spectators, with a pair of field-glasses slung over one shoulder and a snap-shot box across the other, is H. K. Struble.

And say, at last he's gettin' some real satisfaction out of them soap profits. He's the proud father of a golf champ. Well, that's something. I'm kind of glad he's got that much. For, after all, Struble ain't near such a punk proposition as his soap.

CHAPTER V

THE THUMB TEST FOR KIRBY

I DON'T want to seem crabby about it, but I'd like to register an affidavit somewhere that I'm no matrimonial referee. Honest, that's one of the worst things I do.

Maybe you wouldn't think I'd have to say so; I guess most people would take it for granted. But, in case there should be another pair like this Paige girl and J. Kirby Brooks lurkin' anywhere in the background and foolish enough to call on me the way they did—well, I want to warn 'em, that's all. I'm a romance wrecker. And when it comes to directin' the course of true love down a stretch of rough water, I'm about as helpful as a plumber's apprentice tinkerin' a balky cuckoo clock.

The sad part about this case was that I meant well. First off, Nancy Paige was a favorite at our house, from Sadie to Mother Whaley. As for little Sully—well, say; if you want a real enthusiastic report on Miss Paige, just ask him.

As a rule, too, Sully ain't so partial to young female persons—not yet. Generally he hangs his head and pouts when they come around. But when Nancy shows up he lets out a war-

whoop and makes a dive for her. He'll tow her off to the play-room and chatter away to her by the hour, as if she was a ten-year-old boy instead of a young lady goin' on twenty-two.

Sort of discovered Nancy, Sully did. Let's see, it was one day summer before last that he came draggin' her into the yard by the hand and insists on showin' her his turtles and rabbits. Seems she'd run across him down the road apiece trying to capture a green garter-snake for his private zoo. And when she showed him how to spear it with a forked stick, grab it behind the ears, and stow it in an empty candy-box—well, after that he was hers for keeps.

"Say, Pop," he confides to me one night, "know who I'm goin' to marry when I grow up?"

"Couldn't guess," says I.

"Nancy," says he.

"Does she know it?" says I.

"Ho!" says he. "Course not."

And I suspicion that Miss Nancy thinks a good deal of Sully, though she never takes on about him the way some do.

"He's a real boy, isn't he?" is her usual remark after a session with Sully.

Not one of the gushy kind, Nancy. A quiet, well-balanced young person, with steady gray eyes that don't seem to miss much, and a trick of smilin' to herself as if she found life enter-

tainin'. No frills or bluff about her—one of the kind that seems to be too busy studyin' out other folks to think much about herself.

Neighbors of ours, the Paiges have been, ever since we've lived out at Rockhurst-on-the-Sound. In fact, they were there long before we came, though their place down on the Point has been shut more'n it's been open. An odd, squatty, gray old house it is, with a ramblin' collection of wings and sheds tacked on promiscuous, and mostly smothered by vines and scraggly cedars. Looks sort of run-to-seed, you know.

But there's only Nancy and her mother; and old lady Paige—Mrs. Dyckman-Paige, she is—has the name of bein' a bit peculiar. Not batty, you understand, but independent and freaky. Maybe that comes from havin' lived so long in such outlandish places—Siam and Morocco. It was trying to cure Mr. Dyckman-Paige of something or other that started 'em roamin', and by the time he finally cashed in I guess she'd kind of got the habit. Anyway, I gather that she wouldn't have come back to Rockhurst when she did, only the rest of the map was so mussed up with siege-guns and submarines.

And while she was pleasant enough when people took pains to hunt her up, she didn't go out often or show any signs of wantin' to mix much.

Mrs. Paige herself was kind of lame—some trouble with one hip joint. A hook-nosed old

dame she was, with shrewd eyes, prominent cheek-bones, and a solid set chin. She was fond of gettin' herself up in queer rigs, Japaness silk things and such. Smoked cigarettes, too, so they say.

"But, for all that," Sadie reports, "she's bright and interesting. I like her. As for Nancy, she's a jewel."

So our house was one of the few places where the Paiges occasionally came for dinner; and, on account of Sully, Nancy ran in quite often. So much for them.

This J. Kirby Brooks, now, was a different proposition—one of Purdy-Pell's office staff that Mrs. Purdy-Pell had sort of taken up and entered in the younger set. It was her idea, too, I suspect, his comin' to the Physical Culture Studio for a course of boxin' lessons.

"Want to learn how to steam in a few stiff ones, in case you get in a mix-up, eh?" says I.

"Why—er—not exactly," says he. "I'm quite sure I should never allow myself to become involved in—er—in that way. But I'm told that boxing tends to give one a better poise—to make one more flexible, as it were."

"Well," says I, "you could stand a little limberin' up, that's a fact."

That's how I come to get next to J. Kirby. Course, I don't know much about the bond brokerage business. I expect it don't call for any shifty foot-work, but how he could be very useful anywhere was beyond me; for his mind

seems to work almost as stiff as his neck. Anyway, he's one of these rubber-stamp conversers: you know, never usin' anything but book talk, always polite, but just as free and chatty as a set of stencils.

It's the same with his dressin'. Very particular about his clothes, J. Kirby. Why, I expect if he was ever caught out wearin' a soft hat with a frock-coat, he'd sneak home in a taxi with the blinds pulled down.

Honest, for a salaried man he had some mighty high notions. So many things struck him as vulgar—table d'hôte dinners, ready-made shirts, tinted notepaper, havin' to carry home a package, and living at a boarding-house. He had bachelor quarters somewhere, and a fifth share in a valet. Also he sported silk underwear, drank tea for breakfast, and wore a wrist watch. A reg'lar chappie, barrin' his keepin' business hours.

And yet, J. Kirby had made good in the bond house. I'd known of his comin' up from a clerk to be one of Purdy-Pell's confidential men. And I understand he wasn't so much of a flivver at the social act. He had Mrs. Purdy-Pell as a coach, the whole game being to see if he couldn't annex some loppy young Gladys-Maude whose poppa would settle an income on her.

So I didn't take much notice of how frequent him and Miss Paige happened to meet at our house. Still, they did seem to get along to-

gether, after a fashion. Somehow, he appeared to know when he was likely to run across her at our house, and, either before or after he'd been to the Purdy-Pells', he'd drop in. And Sadie's trained me when to duck in such cases. I'd get glimpses, though, of Nancy sittin' quiet, watchin' him in that smilin' way of hers. My guess was that she got more or less amusement out of J. Kirby, and that he was sort of practicin' on her.

And then, here the other night along about ten-thirty, as I'm settled comfy before the livin'-room fire, Sadie comes up behind and taps me on the shoulder.

"Shorty," says she, "someone wants to see you."

"Eh? Me?" says I, rubbin' my eyes.

"A young man—someone you know."

"All right," says I. "Bring him in."

"But he wants to talk to you privately," says Sadie. Then, in a whisper. "It's Kirby Brooks. He's in the study."

"Huh!" says I. "What the blazes——"

"Oh, do go in and hear what he has to say," says Sadie. "I'm dying to know."

Maybe I'd been more cordial if it had been earlier in the evenin'. As it is, I'm smotherin' a yawn as I strolls in where J. Kirby is pacin' the floor restless.

"McCabe," says he, "I trust you will pardon me for imposing on your good nature in this manner, but——"

"Who's been pinched for what?" says I. "If it's a matter of bail bond, let's have the details."

"Oh, it's nothing of the sort, I assure you," says he. "In fact, it's about—er—Miss Paige."

"Nancy!" says I. "What's she been up to?"

"No, no," says he. "You fail to understand. I am in a quandary, that is all."

"Never met one," says I. "What's it like?"

He shrugs his shoulders hopeless, but begins all over again. Well, in his mealy-mouthed way it took him near a quarter of an hour to state the proposition; but when I do surround the idea, believe me, I'm wide awake.

"So?" says I, surveyin' him slit-eyed. "You've been careless enough to go and get soft on Nancy, eh?"

He nods. "I have grown very fond of her," says he.

"But you have your doubts," I goes on, "whether she's quite good enough for you."

"Oh, I say!" he protests.

"Amounts to that, don't it?" says I. "But chiefly you're after a line on her financial ratin'. That correct?"

He fingers his collar nervous, as if it was chafin' his neck.

"I merely intended to suggest," says he, "that I could hardly afford to—er——"

"I get you," says I.

Then I blazes ahead sort of crisp:

"Now listen to me, Kirby, while I tell you a few things. First off, you're dead right. She ain't good enough for you—not by a mile. You're too elegant a party for her—too classy and refined altogether. Course, you've come up from nothing much. I don't know just where you started; but that don't matter. You're a perfectly nice young gent now. You keep yourself tubbed and tailored and manicured like a pet Pomeranian. You've practiced pink-tea manners until they come almost natural, and you do the society patter so it can hardly be detected from the real thing. While Miss Paige—well, she's apt to be a bit crude, ain't she?"

"Oh, see here," he breaks in. "I didn't mean that she was not——"

"Sure, I know," says I. "You're partial to her, though. And that's what's apt to get you in wrong. But lemme point out that she wouldn't do for you at all. Your talents run to usherin' at weddin's, and bein' nice to the patronesses at subscription dances, and gettin' yourself asked around. Nancy would want you to play golf and tennis with her, and she'd smear you at either. Besides, there's mother. By the way, Kirby, how do you and Mrs. Dyckman-Paige hit it off?"

He sort of shivers.

"Rather badly, I fear," says he. "She—she

is always asking me if I have a stiff neck. Once she insisted on rubbing it with some atrocious-smelling oil. I haven't been there since. Their home is such a weird, old-fashioned place, too."

"Oh, well," says I, "what do you expect?"

He bit at that.

"But she is not really poor, is she?"

"So that's why you tackled me, eh?" I demands.

"I—I thought you would know," says he; "and, naturally, I was——"

"I see," says I. "I'll tell you this much: the old girl is wearin' the same hat she landed in nearly two years ago."

Kirby sighs deep.

"I—I thought as much," says he. "Sorry if I've bothered you, and—and thanks awfully."

I grinned as I let him out the side door, and when I goes back to Sadie I'm lookin' cheerful and satisfied.

"Wasn't it something about Nancy?" she asks.

"It was," says I, "but I put a crimp in it."

"You didn't discourage him, did you?" says she.

"Didn't I, though!" says I. "Why, that poor prune went away with his mangy little romance shot as full of holes as a Swiss cheese. He won't hang around Nancy any more, I'm bettin'."

So it was more or less of a jolt, the very next Sunday afternoon about dusk, as I'm swingin' towards home from a tramp around the Point, to run across J. Kirby just leavin' the Paiges' front gates. He nods stiff and pikes by without a word. Nancy is standin' there gazin' after him, and as I comes along she gives me the hail.

"Oh, Mr. McCabe!" says she. "You're the very one I wanted to see."

"Then we're both in luck," says I. "What'll it be?"

She always goes straight to the point, Nancy.

"I wish," says she, "you would tell me just what you think of Kirby."

"Hel-lup!" says I. "Why should I think of Kirby at all?"

"That's dodging," says she. "And I'm sure you must know him very well. You see, mother has taken such a dislike to him and she has slammed him so hard that I—well, I'd like to know. Of course, he's not just what I call really human; but he has a lot of good points, hasn't he?"

"Huh!" says I. "This is a love affair, ain't it?"

"I—I suppose so, in a way," she admits.

"Then don't you dare try gettin' me mixed up in it, young lady," says I.

"Pooh!" says she. "You ought to feel flattered."

"I don't," says I. "Besides, you young folks never take advice, anyway. Look at Kirby, there. Didn't I give it to him straight, only the other day?"

"About me?" says Nancy. "How interesting! What did you tell him?"

"That you wasn't good enough for him," says I.

"O-o-o-oh!" gasps Nancy. "Why, Mr. McCabe!"

"You would ask," says I. "And if I'm pushed I'll tell you the same about him. Fact! If either of you had any sense, you'd quit."

Nancy giggles.

"All right," says she. "Suppose I do just as you say. How shall I——"

"Excuse me, Miss Paige," says I, holdin' up both hands, "but I'm not conductin' this campaign. Go ask Sadie, or Mrs. Purdy-Pell. They're experts."

Nancy shakes her head.

"I want an opinion from the male of the species," says she. "What about Kirby as a man?"

"He's perfectly ladylike," says I.

"I don't believe it," says she, tossin' up her chin.

"Didn't expect you would—unless you wanted to," says I. "So what's the use in my addin' that he's a selfish young whelp with no sand in his craw whatever?"

"You don't think," says Nancy, "that you could be mistaken about Kirby?"

"Could you?" says I.

"That's so," says she. "I've really seen very little of him. That's what I told him when he—well, to-day."

"Oh!" says I. "Then he went on the mat, did he?"

She nods.

"It came out so suddenly," says Nancy. "I didn't know he could be so—so impetuous."

"Nor I," says I.

"I promised to give him an answer within a month or so," says Nancy. "We shall probably know each other much better by then. You see, mother has decided to live in town for a while. She wants to try a new treatment for her lameness. So we've taken a house. We are to move down Wednesday. Such a job!"

Which was where I made a reckless play. "If I can help any," says I, "call on me."

"Oh, may we?" says Nancy. "It is going to be rather complicated, getting mother down, and all. And you wouldn't mind if Kirby went along? He has volunteered, too."

"The more the messier," says I.

I guess neither of us knew just what we was bein' let in for; but when we reports at 8 A.M. at the front door of the Paige house, we found out. It seems the help was goin' later by train; but Mrs. Dyckman-Paige, on account of her bum

hip, couldn't travel that way. She had a classy new limousine standin' in the driveway.

Our first job is to help stow her in the car. She greets me real friendly as I gets a grip on one side of her, but she gives Kirby the chilly stare.

"Humph!" says she. "You here?"

"Yes, Mother," puts in Nancy. "Mr. Brooks came out especially. I thought he might be useful."

"Perhaps he will," says Mother. "Let him hold Yetto."

"That's Mother's chief pet," says Nancy. "I'll bring him out."

So in a minute more Kirby's sittin' in the car, embracin' a brass cage the size of a pickle keg, containin' about the biggest and vividest cockatoo I'd ever seen.

"Be very careful of Yetto," warns Mrs. Paige. "Don't drop him, young man."

"Certainly not," says Kirby.

I was just smotherin' a grin, when out comes the maid and hands me a glass globe full of goldfish.

"Now you get in, Nancy," says Mrs. Paige, "and the butler will bring us the other things."

Say, when Nancy described movin' as a complicated affair for mother, she hadn't exaggerated. Mrs. Dyckman-Paige traveled like an Uncle Tom show, carryin' all her own scenery. Yetto and the goldfish was only a beginnin'. Next came a little black Chow dog that she

cuddled under her arm. Then, there was hat-boxes, things done up in newspaper, a tall china vase that had to be wrapped in a lap-robe and wedged in between us; and last of all the butler lugs out a framed oil paintin' that he hands to Nancy.

"Grandmother's portrait," explains Nancy. "I think that is all."

"Drive carefully, but don't poke along," are Mrs. Paige's orders to the chauffeur.

Ever do much tourin' with an aquarium on your knees? It's sloppy sport. But I had a rain-coat spread out in my lap, and what spilled out ran to one side. I didn't know until afterward that most of it trickled down Kirby's right trouser leg and into his shoe. He never said a word.

Kirby had other troubles. You see, him and the cockatoo hadn't been introduced, and Yetto didn't care for strangers. Anyway, he seemed to have a grudge against Kirby. He'd sidle up to one end of his perch, cant his head on one side sleuthy, let out a screech like breakin' a pane of glass, and make a vicious stab at Kirby's fingers.

Kirby, though, he'd be peekin' through the top of the cage, and at just the right second he'd let go with that hand. You couldn't blame him. Yetto had a curved upper bill three inches long, and a stubby under one that made perfect connection; hard as steel too.

When he'd make a miss, Yetto would laugh

WAS JUST SMOTHERIN' A GRIN, WHEN
T COMES THE MAID, AND HANDS ME A
BE FULL OF GOLDFISH."

disagreeable, whet his face on the perch, and hunch along towards the other hand. He was a perseverin' bird, and he seemed to be enjoyin' the game. I don't think Kirby found it so entertainin'. He stuck to it solemn, though, without sayin' a word.

For that matter, all of us was too busy to chat much. I was tryin' to balance the goldfish bowl and watch Kirby's maneuvers; Mrs. Dyckman-Paige was soothin' the Chow dog, that had spells of wantin' to jump through the window; and Nancy was mostly obscured behind grandmother's picture.

All along the route, too, we scattered sensations and merriment. Folks would run to the windows to stare after us, or stand gawpin' on the sidewalks. Mainly they seemed interested in Kirby, his lapful bein' the most conspicuous.

"Hey, you!" shouts one motor-truck driver, "why don't you git in th' cage with him?" But most of 'em calls after us: "Polly! Polly want a cracker?"

Kirby pinks up lovely, but tends strictly to business.

As we struck the asphalt in Pelham Parkway, we skidded a bit, which jolted us all around some, and Nancy asks anxious:

"Are you getting along all right over there?"

"Oh—er—quite," says Kirby, a little jerky, for he was just makin' a quick shift of hands.

"That's nice," says Nancy. "I don't see

how we would have managed without you and Mr. McCabe."

"Why, I'm havin' the time of my life," says I, watchin' Yetto brace himself for another stab.

Believe me, that was some ride. As we got into town it was equal to takin' part in a circus parade. Along towards the last I got interested in the goldfish. Never took much notice of such pets before; but these had big round eyes that was almost human, and the reproachful way they'd stare at me was weird. You'd have thought they objected to bein' joggled around in a limousine and was holdin' me responsible.

"Here we are!" says Mother finally, and I looks out to see that we're pullin' up in front of a swell bay-window joint on Riverside Drive. I don't believe Kirby had any idea where we were.

"Perhaps the men had better get out first," suggests Nancy. "Mr. Brooks can carry Yetto inside, and— Why, what is Yetto up to? He —he's chewing something, isn't he?"

"Only my thumb," says Kirby.

"Wha-a-at!" gasps Nancy. "Your thumb? Don't let him. Pull it away."

"I—I can't," says Kirby.

"Blow in his face," says Nancy. "Blow hard! Here, let me."

And, droppin' grandmother, she leans over the china vase and puffs out her cheeks. That

did the trick. Yetto ruffles his neck feathers, screeches indignant, and backs off.

"Goodness!" says Nancy. "Your eyes are full of tears. Why, you poor boy, your thumb is bleeding!"

"Is it?" says Kirby. "He—he's had it for some time. I didn't drop him, though."

"Oh, Kirby!" groans Nancy, whippin' out a handkerchief and doin' the first-aid act. "Why, you're a regular Spartan hero, and—and I don't care who knows it—you're a dear!"

"Am I?" says Kirby, gazin' mushy at her. "Then—then it was worth it, Nancy."

"Humph!" says Mrs. Dyckman-Paige. "You've got good grit, young man, I must say."

With that Nancy whirls on me.

"Now, Mr. McCabe?" says she.

"Decision reversed," says I. "You win. But, if you don't mind, I'd like to shift these goldfish to something solid."

I expect that Kirby has discovered by this time that, for all her punk lids and her freak way of livin', Mrs. Dyckman-Paige owns solid blocks of Manhattan and that rentin' a furnished house on the Drive won't even make a dent in her income. But that's nothing against him. He'd picked Nancy when he thought different.

When Sadie gets the news, she smiles sarcastic.

"But I understood, Shorty," says she, "that you had broken up that affair—completely?"

"So I had," says I, "until Kirby goes and feeds his thumb to a bloomin' cockatoo. I hadn't counted on that."

CHAPTER VI

WHAT MILO NEEDED MOST

As a rule I don't indulge much in private feuds; that is, these serial grouches, the kind that has to be nursed along like a log fire and poked up every now and then. I'm more apt to have it out on the spot, tell 'em what I think right off the reel, get their full opinion of me, and let that end it.

But somehow I couldn't manage that way with this Milo Dixon, and the first thing I knew we'd worked up a first-class case of *gr-r-r-r* at each other. Maybe I'm partly to blame, too; for it all starts with my droppin' in casual at his Broadway offices without havin' my secretary make an appointment with his secretary.

How should I guess, though, that Milo was such an important party? Course, I knew he was head of the works that old man Dixon left him a few years ago; also, I understood he'd branched out and was mixed up in half a dozen other schemes—tractions, submarine contracts, and the like. But mainly these young plutes that have their names sprinkled at the top of

the letter-heads are just check-book presidents, with someone else to do the real work.

Besides, I didn't give a hoot how big a gun he was. As members of the buildin' committee of the Rockhurst Yacht Club we was on an equal footin', except that he was chairman. And he'd been stallin' us off long enough about decidin' on the plans for this new wing we'd voted to build if we could raise the coin. Half a dozen times I'd tackled him on the subject, generally on the train, and he'd always said, "Yes, yes, McCabe; we must get around to that, but—er—not just now." And here the annual meetin', when we was due to make a report, was only three weeks off.

So, being over near his buildin' one day, and havin' half an hour to spare, I just naturally blows in, brushes the office-boys one side, and pikes right through where he's sittin' at a big roll-top doin' nothing in the world but tearin' up paper and throwin' it on the rug.

"Come, Dixon," says I, thumpin' him friendly on the shoulder, "let's get some action on those plans."

He winces like I'd jabbed a pin in him.

"Eh?" says he, scowlin' up at me. "Oh, it's you, McCabe."

"Didn't think it was the sheriff, did you?" says I, chucklin' hearty and pullin' up a chair. "Now, about those sketches for the new wing. You got 'em, ain't you?"

He gazes at me vague.

"New wing?" says he. "Oh, for the club-house! Really, McCabe, I—I can't do anything about that now."

"Ah, come off!" says I. "It won't take ten minutes. And you know we've got to——"

"No, no," he breaks in pettish. "I tell you, I can't. I—I won't be bothered with it, that's all."

"Piffle!" says I. "All you got to do is——"

"Hang it, man, can't you understand plain language?" he snaps. "No, I said. You've no right to come in here, hounding me like this. I—I'll not stand it!"

I gawped at him.

"Why, you poor prune," says I, "who do you think you are, anyway? Botherin' you, eh? Well, it's all over. I'm through. I wouldn't serve on a garbage committee with you after this."

And with that mild statement of the case I marches out dignified. The president of the Club got both our resignations in the mornin' mail, and from then on all me and Milo Dixon exchanged was savage glares.

That awful state of affairs must have been goin' on for near six weeks, with no blood shed on either side, when here the other afternoon, just as I'm closin' the Physical Culture Studio for the day, who should drift in hesitatin' through the front office door but Milo Dixon.

He's a tall, lathy young gent, you know, with deep-set eyes, droopy shoulders, and a nervous

trick of rubbin' his hand over his chin while he talks. Generally he's rather a spiffy dresser, but now he has a dent in his derby, his tie is skewed, and his fur-lined overcoat is buttoned up wrong. Also his chin is decorated with a cross design of surgeon's tape, and he has both arms full of bundles.

"Huh!" says I, givin' him the once-over.

"Don't!" says he, sort of pleadin'. "Please don't, McCabe."

"Eh?" says I. "Don't what?"

"Don't look at me like that," he goes on. "Oh, I know I deserve it. I—I'm an ass, Shorty."

"Nobody's disputin' you," says I. "What then?"

"About those plans," says he. "I didn't mean to be such a cad. Really! I—I apologize."

"Oh!" says I. "Well, I expect I went off half-cocked that time myself, so we'll call it fifty-fifty, eh?"

"Thanks, old man," says he. "I—I'm glad that's off my mind."

"Me, too," says I. "But sit down. Goin' out on the five-eleven, are you?"

"I suppose I've missed the four-forty," says he. "I should have caught it, too. Oh, dear!"

Such a worried look he works up that I has to laugh. Standin' there with his arms loaded, and one side of his overcoat hiked

up, and a wisp of rumpled hair stickin' straight out over his ear, he's almost a caricature of himself.

"You know, Shorty," he goes on, "I hadn't the slightest notion of coming up here until I happened to see your name on the windows. Then I just had to. For that silly row of ours has troubled me a lot, and I—I have so many other worries. Oh, so many!"

"Ye-e-es, you must," says I, smilin' sarcastic. "Is runnin' a local express one of 'em? Tryin' to put the parcels post out of business, are you?"

"Oh, these," says he, sighin'. "No wonder you ask. And I loathe carrying packages."

"Well, you can unload for a minute or two, can't you," says I, "or have you got 'em tied to you? What is all that junk, anyway?"

"Things I've neglected to order," says he, "until too late to have them delivered. This largest bundle, for instance, is an electrolier shade, to replace one that was broken weeks ago."

"Oh, I see," says I, liftin' it off and pilin' it on the desk.

"And here is a pair of evening slippers of Mrs. Dixon's," he goes on. "I was to tell them about changing the buckles, and I forgot until to-day. They match a dress she wants to wear to-night. Then this heavy thing is a Virginia ham which the butler asked me to send out early

in the week. And that box of cigars—well, I hadn't noticed until this morning that the humidor was nearly empty."

"Huh!" says I. "Been havin' a reg'lar shoppin' orgy, eh?"

"I had to," says he. "All these little things have been haunting me for days. I've felt so guilty about them, more so than about really important things that I should have done, too. And when I found I had to go away—well, I thought I would do what I could first."

"Where you goin'?" says I.

"I don't know—yet," says he, finally slumpin' into a chair. "The specialist didn't say. It's my nerves, you know. Overwork. He said I must stop at once; go somewhere—away off; absolute rest; South, I suppose. He—he wants me to play golf." And Milo groans.

"Oh, come!" says I. "Anybody would think you'd been sentenced to the rockpile. Most people would jump at an excuse for gettin' in a month of winter golf."

"But I don't see how I can drop everything and go just now. My affairs are in such a frightful mess. I suppose I must, though. He said I was in bad shape."

"Most anybody could tell that," says I. "You've got the jumps, all right. But I ain't so sure you can run away from 'em by buyin' a railroad ticket."

"Just what occurred to me," says Milo;

"only I hadn't the courage to tell him so. It would be running away, wouldn't it? But what else can I do? What would you recommend, McCabe?"

"Me?" says I. "Why, I'm no nerve specialist."

"But you keep yourself from getting into a state like this," he insists, "and you sometimes put men in condition when they're out of sorts. I've heard so. I say, Shorty, why couldn't you fix me up? If you could, without packing me off to some beastly resort for middle-aged golf maniacs, it—it would be worth thousands of dollars to me."

"Would it?" says I. "And about how many to me?"

He don't even bat an eyelash.

"Five," says he.

I chuckles easy. "You're on," says I.

Course, I was just tryin' to jolt him out of his trance; but what does the simp do but unlimber a check-book and start in makin' out a pink slip.

"Stow that," says I. "I was only kiddin' you along. I'm no screen bandit. But I shouldn't wonder if I could help you shake some of these hysterics of yours; that is, if you'll do just as I say."

He promises eager that he will.

"Then let's have a sketch of all this overwork you've been doin'," says I. "Gimme the details."

"But—but I haven't time," he protests, pullin' out his watch. "Heavens! After five now and I should be starting home. We have a dinner party on."

"Mistake number one," says I. "It's scratched. I'll phone out that you won't be there. A hot addition to a dinner party you'd be, wouldn't you?"

"But those slippers," says he. "Bella needs those to——"

"If they're her only pair," says I, "she can spring a barefoot stunt."

"Oh, to be sure, she has others," says he, "which might do. But there is that electrolier shade and—and the ham."

"Dixon," says I, tappin' him on the wishbone, "how much are you rated at—a couple of millions, eh?"

"Something like that, I suppose."

"Then what's a ham more or less?" I demands.

"Why," says he, gawpin', "I—I don't understand."

"It's simple enough," says I. "You've mislaid your sense of proportion. Now we'll begin this treatment by gettin' it back. Wait until I open a window. There! That lets on an air-shaft. Now take that ham and chuck it out."

"Wha-a-a-at?" he gasps.

"Chuck it," says I, "or I quit the case right here."

Like he was walkin' in his sleep, Dixon lifts the ham off the desk and drops it gentle out of the window.

"Next the big bundle—the shade," says I. "And throw it this time—reckless."

He's a little more energetic; but as the sound of smashin' glass floats up, he shudders.

"Now the slippers," says I, "and the cigars. Show some speed about it, too."

"Oh, I say, McCabe," he protests, "I think this is rather silly, you know."

"A swell judge of what's silly you are, aren't you?" says I. "Take a look at yourself in the glass, there."

"No, thank you," says he grabbin' the parcels. "I—I'll take your word for it."

And with that he feeds more loot down where the janitor will be surprised to find it in the mornin'.

"Now," says I, pushin' him back into the chair, "we'll proceed to sponge off the rest of the slate. What about these awful business complications that's been chasin' you towards a nut factory? State 'em."

Which he does, with full details and dismal groans sprinkled in. Seemed sort of relieved to talk about 'em, too. But the most I could make out of the mess was that he'd simply let a lot of things pile up on him because he couldn't hand out decisions. He'd dodged and side-stepped and dilly-dallied, just as he had about them buildin' plans. He'd got a lot of

people sore on him, pulled a couple of damage suits, fired one of his best men, and got so he wa'n't on speakin' terms with another.

"It has been first one thing and then another," says he, "until I broke under the strain. The specialist knew in a moment. Overwork."

"Bunk!" says I.

"I beg pardon?" says he.

"Underwork, more likely," I goes on, "and over-stewin'. That's my dope for it. Maybe it ain't so soothin' to listen to, but it's nearer the truth. Work don't hurt anybody—real work. That is, so long as you do the drivin'. And what you could get in between nine-thirty and four should have been just play. The trouble with you, Milo, is that you've been lettin' your work drive you. You gave up the whip. Not only your work has been drivin' you, but your play, your home, your club, everything. I don't know how it begun. It don't matter. But here you are, a squirmin', shirkin', panicky wreck, with your nerves all raw and your liver spotted up like a leopard-skin coat. Even lost your shavin' nerve, didn't you?"

He nods and fingers the patches on his chin.

"Couldn't face your butler without that ham under your arm, eh?" says I. "Well, we've fixed that. You're goin' to burn a lot more bridges, too, before you quit. First off, you're goin' to notify Mrs. Dixon that you won't be home for two or three days. Better telegraph. Here's a blank."

"But, McCabe——" he begins.

"I know," says I. "A dinner party on, week-end guests coming, and maybe you ought to pick out the linin' for a new limousine. Tremendous affairs. You'd half-shirk all of 'em. So we'll just cut out the whole lot and see if it brings the world to an end. Come, now! 'To Mrs. Milo Dixon.' That's it. 'Called away on important business' will do."

He moves over to my desk and writes out the message.

"Which ends domestic complications," says I. "Now for things at the office. Who's got the best head down there?"

"Why—er—Talbot, I suppose," says Dixon; "but he's the one I haven't spoken to for——"

"All the better," says I. "Tell Talbot to take full charge for a spell and use his nut. Tell him to clean things up generally, in his own way."

"But we radically disagree," says Dixon, "in the matter of——"

"What's the odds?" says I. "Wouldn't break you if he was wrong, would it? And ten to one he's right. Anyway, you want to start something—swing the whip. See?"

It brought the sweat out on Milo's forehead to write that order, but he did it.

"Now for that liver of yours," says I.

Not that I'm much better posted on the human plumbing than the next one, but when I see a party with the whites of his eyes lookin'

like hard-boiled eggs with the peel off, I accuse his liver on general principles. It can't furnish any alibi, for one thing, and it listens sort of professional.

"We'll take it out in the country," says I.

"Take what?" says Milo.

"Your liver," says I. "Course, you'll have to come along, too. Let's see, where's that Jersey Central time-table? Huh! Next express at six-twenty-two. That just leaves time for me to call up my house, notify Sadie not to look for me, and throw a few duds into a bag."

"But I have no traveling things with me," objects Milo; "no pajamas, no——"

"Don't worry," says I. "When you hit the hay to-night you ain't goin' to care whether your shoes are on or off. As a starter you may shuck that mink-lined ulster and pull this sweater over your head."

I expect Milo began to suspicion this wasn't goin' to be any de luxe excursion I was headin' him at; but he couldn't have guessed the trip I had in mind or I'd never got him past Jersey City. All the dinner I let him have was two cups of hot milk and a few crackers. For dessert he had half a dozen puffs of a cigarette. Then for near an hour and a half I made him doze in a parlor-car chair while we rolled down towards the middle of the State. Below Lakewood there's a junction where the coast branch comes in, but in winter only once in a while a train connects there. I'd figured on that.

"Well, well!" says I. "It's a case of hike. This way, Milo."

"How far do we walk?" asks Milo, gazin' regretful after the train.

"I forget," says I. "All you got to remember is that there's a bed at the other end of this road. Step out, man. Don't drag your heels."

As a matter of fact, that road wasn't intended for fancy pedestrian stunts—nothing but deep sand. And lonesome! If there were any houses along the line, none of 'em showed a light. All we could see was pines and plum bushes, and half of a moon dodgin' in and out between the clouds. But it was first-class breathin' air, believe me, that this panicky Dixon party was pumpin' in reg'lar. Course, he didn't know where he was goin' or why, but all that helped him to forget his troubles. I'll admit he did take on a bit along towards the last; but when I threatened to make him carry the bag if he didn't quit beefin', he marched on without another word.

And just as we stumbled into Cedarton I finds my old friend George, the mighty duck-hunter and hotel-keeper, turnin' out the lights in the bar.

"How's the ice in the river, George?" says I.

"Oh, there's a channel open below Kirk's," says he.

"Anybody got a motor-boat in commission?" I asks.

"Guess Pop Applegard's old tub is runnin',"

says George. "He was down after geese Wednesday."

"Then send him word he's chartered for tomorrow, will you," says I. "And have a couple of good husky breakfasts ready for us about five o'clock. We'll turn in now."

Milo he hadn't even waited for the word. He'd gone to sleep standin' up. No insomnia for him that night, and next mornin' I had some job draggin' him down to face a platter of ham and eggs. He wanted to know if I thought such a late supper would agree with him. By daylight we were on our way.

Maybe you don't know that twelve-mile stretch of beach that keeps the Atlantic Ocean from sloppin' into Barnegat Bay? Well, it's about the beachiest beach you ever saw. Nothing but beach. Oh, there's three life-saving stations scattered along, tucked in among the sand-dunes, but not another shack from the time you leave Seaside Park until you fetch North Point o' Beach. Twelve miles of hard packed sand, and nobody to it.

The sun was just slippin' up out of the waves, red and gorgeous, when we landed on the bay side and Pop Applegard went chug-chuggin' off through Fisherman's Slue towards the main channel. Five minutes more and we'd plowed across to the very edge of the big salt water and was headed down the beach, with a tangy little breeze pinkin' up our ears.

Once before I'd taken that jaunt, just to see

what it was like, and ever since I'd been wantin' to do it again; but I never planned on towin' a bilious plute along for the sake of his liver. We hadn't been hikin' half an hour, though, when Milo begins to chirk up.

"By George!" says he, throwin' up his chin and swellin' out his chest. "Great, isn't it? Look at that cloud effect. And see that old schooner wallowing along out there. What a surf, too! And we have it all to ourselves, haven't we?"

"No competition at all," says I.

We'd passed the second station before he digs up his first uneasy thought.

"Oh, I say," says he. "What about luncheon?"

"We don't feed until we get to North Point," says I.

"Oh!" says he, and lets out another link in his stride.

I don't know what there is about coverin' the ground that way, specially a long, lonesome stretch, that sort of makes you feel you'd done something worth while. But it does. Bucks you up, clears the bats out of the belfry, and gives you the idea that you're some guy to do all that just on your two legs without the aid of a taxi. Simple, but it's so. Before we was hardly in sight of the Point, Milo begins unloadin' chesty opinions of his performance.

"I say, though, that's a deuce of a ways I've walked," says he. "Isn't it, now? Twelve!

Oh, I should say twenty at least. Right along the beach, too. Rather unique, I call it. But hungry!"

"Me too," says I. "Thanks be, Pop Applegard is on the job. See that smoke?"

Also Pop had picked up a bushel of Cedar Creek oysters, and had a lot of 'em spread out on a wire gratin' with their shells gapin'. Ever tackle a bushel of roast oysters with an appetite like that? Honest, when we got through we could hardly see each other across the shell heap between us. Then I let Milo roll up in one of the blankets Pop had brought, light a big cigar, and snuggle down in the sand and sunshine. When he woke up he gazes around placid and asks where Pop Applegard has gone.

"Back home," says I. "I had him leave some grub, though, and an ax. My scheme is to bunk out here for the night."

"Bully!" says Milo. "Can't we build some sort of shelter with this drift-wood?"

"That's what the ax is for," says I. "Go to it."

Well, it wasn't exactly picnic weather, specially after the sun went down; but we had a shack that was fairly wind-proof on three sides, and a roarin' fire in front. Even if Milo didn't show up for so much of an artist at broilin' steak, he seems proud of the result. The potatoes was a little cindery too, on the outside, but you could eat the middles. Milo got away with six, he claimed. And even after

he got to sleep he was eloquent about something or other.

Anyway, when Pop Applegard came to take us off, about noon next day, Dixon was explainin' to me how he'd like to do that sort of thing for a whole week.

"I could, you know," he insists. "I'm not half so soft as I thought. Really!"

"Maybe," says I. "But you'll be a lot more ornamental with less smut on your face. It's town for you now, and a Turkish bath, and a barber gettin' busy with that stubble."

I stuck with him until he'd gone through the whole process, and with a little clean linen and a quick job of clothes-pressin' he looked as good as new.

"Now," says I, "I'm going to turn you loose with your troubles again. You can either chase them or let 'em chase you."

"Shorty," says he, "I can feel the whip in my hand once more. I—I believe I can do the driving now. Anyway, I'm going to have a try at it."

Well, that was Monday. And Thursday afternoon I had a report from him.

"I say, Shorty," he 'phones in, "you were right about Talbot. He closed a splendid deal for us, and now we're hot after another one. I have a clean desk, too. Got things on the jump, as it were."

"Fine!" says I, "so long as the jumps don't get you."

"No danger," says he. "And, by the way, since the cure is complete, I am sending a messenger up with that check. I am much obliged, too."

And he leaves me there gawpin' into the receiver. Five thousand, just like that. Say, that's pickin' it off the bushes, ain't it? And him wishin' it on me cheerful! But I suspect that Milo's ain't the only case of the kind in this burg, nor him the only one willin' to pay the price. Gee! I must hang out a bigger sign.

CHAPTER VII

LETTING PEABODY IN

I EXPECT one of the six or seven reasons why I ain't in the super-tax class is my habit of seein' things different from them that are. Stack me up against a plute, and nine times out of ten we'll drift into some hot debate, with him on one side of the fence and me 'way over in the other lot. Showin' that I got a non-dividend-producin' mind and too little sense to conceal the fact.

You'd 'most think, though, when it comes to good payin' reg'lars here at the Physical Culture Studio, that I'd stay off the now-just-lissen-to-me stuff and let 'em get away with their own private opinions. Wouldn't you? And that's the bright particular resolution I start in with 'most every day.

But say! An hour after I've pinned that motto on the wall, I'm just as liable to stop in the middle of a ten-a-throw boxin' lesson to show some bank president where his notions on what we should have done to Mexico, or how to deal with a bunch of strikin' silk weavers, are absolutely nutty and completely wrong. I'm just that mulish.

In the case of Peabody Hatch, specially, I

might have kept the lid on. With him payin' extra for private sessions, what should I care what he thought about anything? All he looked for from me was to provide an indoor substitute for golf and polo while he's tied up here in town watchin' a lot of shifty lawyers straighten out the umpteen million dollar estate that old man Hatch had dropped so sudden. Nice, pleasant-spoken, clean-cut young gent too, even if he does wear his nose a little high.

And this crack of his about the wops was only casual. I was sittin' at my desk with my feet up, glancin' through the noon edition, as he blows in. The big head-lines catch his eye. Another of them labor riots—train-load of strike-breakers met by the usual enthusiastic committee, the militia called out, and a dozen or more of the brick-throwers, includin' a couple of women and a nine-year-old boy, mowed down by the rifles.

He shrugs his shoulders careless as he pulls off his yellow gloves.

"Still at it, are they, Shorty?" says he. "Foreigners, of course. I suppose it's too much to hope that some day they will learn either to behave themselves or stay away."

"When they do stay away," says I, "who'll run the steel mills and coal mines? Us horny-handed native sons?"

"That's our big problem," says he—"how to manage these masses of aliens: an ignorant, vicious lot, the scum of Europe."

"Oh, they ain't all so bad," says I. "Now take the Dagoes."

"No, thanks," says he, laughin' good-natured. "I think the Italians are the very worst we get."

Course, he don't mean it messy, but that happens to be a knock at my pet theory. You know, we got quite a settlement of Giuseppes and Salvatores out at Rockhurst-on-the-Sound, and I've always got along with 'em fine. Why, here last fall they wanted to run me for sheriff. Seems I'd got popular with 'em in some way—maybe by puttin' through that playground scheme, or by goin' bail now and then for friends of my man Dominick.

Anyway, the better I got to know the Italians the more good points I discovered, until I finally decided that, barrin' a few who had been brought up to wear knives in their boots, they was almost as human as any of us. So I proceeds to state my views for Mr. Hatch's benefit. I tells him what steady, hard workers they are, how fond they are of their families, how gentle with their kids, and so on.

"And when it comes to the second crop," I goes on, "their young folks who've had a chance to live fairly decent and get some schoolin'—well, I'm backin' 'em to show up strong. Who do you suppose wrote the class song at our High School graduatin' exercises last spring? Miss Teresa Romano, who was born in the back room of a cobbler's shop

opposite the Rockhurst railroad station. You ought to see her, too. Reg'lar young queen. Why, even old Pete, that runs the shine parlor out at the corner, has got a son who looks like a college hick. Maybe I can point him out some day. He's in here, off and on. Some bright lad, young Pete is, believe me."

Maybe I spread it a bit thick, but the sarcastic smile Peabody develops sort of rubbed my disposition the wrong way.

"All very interesting," says he, "but—er—suppose we get to work."

Which should have been my cue to side-track the argument. But all the while he's gettin' into his gym. suit I kept mullin' it over, thinkin' up snappy comebacks and new ways of statin' what I'd said before. Even after we got busy with the gloves, I couldn't help lettin' some of 'em slip out.

"Think they're just scum, eh?" says I, plowin' in a half-arm jab to his ribs. "Huh! Cover up there with your right. That's it. Scum be blowed! You don't know 'em, that's all. You"—here I gets past his guard for an ear-stinger—"you can't judge by ridin' by 'em in a limousine. See, you should have ducked that one. Foot work now; you ain't posin' for your picture, you know. And if you think they're all scum— Oh, excuse me, but the way to that beak of yours was wide open. Tapped the claret, did I?

"Hey, Swifty! Pail and sponge up."

"If you don't mind," says Peabody, as we're removin' the stains from his map, "I'd rather not discuss sociology while I'm boxing. It—it's a trifle distracting, you know."

"Sure!" says I. "My error."

Couldn't do more, could I? And, while I suspicion he ain't half-convinced, I lets the subject drop. Next time I'm in Pete Rinaldi's shoe-polishin' and hat-cleanin' emporium, though, I thinks of Peabody.

"Pete," says I, as the bullet-headed, broad-faced old pirate prepares to put a mirror gloss on my tan shoes, "how's the heir apparent comin' on?"

It's one of our stock jokes, and Pete looks up with a grin.

"Gotta fine job now," says he. "Playa da violin for Café Napoli."

"Took him on reg'lar, did they?" says I. "But what about that real estate place I found for him?"

Old Pete hunches his shoulders.

"Too mucha work," says he. "They no lika him come late; giva da chuck."

"That'll never do," says I. "Fiddlin' evenin's in one of these Chianti tango joints is well enough as a side line, but it ain't goin' to get him anywhere. I'll have to have another talk with him. You send him round."

You see, I'd been sort of coachin' young Pete along for some time, now—ever since the day I'd seen this spruce young chap climb down out

of the chair, nod careless to the old man, and go off without payin' for his shine.

"Run charge accounts, do you?" I asks.

Old Pete explains sheepish how that's his son, who was workin' over on Seventh Avenue in a pool parlor. A few days later he introduces him reg'lar, and he strikes me as such a bright young chap that I got more or less interested. Maybe it was that happy, good-natured smile of his.

Anyway, when I finds he's only nineteen and already married, with a wife and youngster to look out for, I kind of begins plannin' things out for him. First off I got him another job, ad. clerk in a newspaper office, with a chance to work up.

Well, you know how it is when you start in backin' a party that way: you feel sort of responsible for 'em. And, while young Pete seemed to make good from the first, somehow he didn't last out. He was no stayer. So I rustles him another place. And then another. In fact, every little while I finds myself scratchin' my head and botherin' my friends to find a new job for young Pete. For I couldn't help believin' he had it in him to win out.

Meanwhile, he seems to be improvin' right along. He was so quick at catchin' on. Why, say, if it wasn't for his curly black hair and the little smoky tint in his complexion you'd never take him for a Dago at all. I'll admit that his

taste in dress does run to knobby-toed shoes and scalloped pockets and noisy ties, but he's only copyin' the class he trains with, most of 'em native born.

And early in the game he quit flaggin' as Rinaldi, changin' it to Reynolds. Didn't even pick a wife from among his own people, but hooks up with a young Polish girl he'd met while he was helpin' run a hand laundry.

So, you see, young Pete had broken clear away from the Mulberry Street crowd, and as a sample of what the second crop could be he promised well. He sort of stood for what I'd always argued along that line, and some day I expected to point with pride to him.

But hearin' how he'd been fired from the real estate office didn't swell my chest any. I meant to tell him a few things when he showed up. A week or ten days go by, though, and no sign of him. When I asks the old man, he just humps his eyebrows.

"Sick, maybe," says he. "Maybe not."

I gathers there's been a little disagreement between 'em—a case of too frequent touch, perhaps. So I goes back to the Studio and puts Peabody through his course of sprouts. I was debatin' whether, when I got through with him, I shouldn't go scoutin' after young Pete myself, when Swifty Joe comes into the gym. and reports mysterious that there's a lady waitin' to see me in the front office.

"What lady?" says I, keepin' an eye on Peabody's left and feintin' for his wind.

"Ahr-r-r, chee!" says Swifty. "How should I know? Not a reg'lar lady, y'understand. Gotta couple of kids with her."

"Suppose we stop, then?" suggests Peabody. "Time's nearly up."

"All right," says I, shuckin' the gloves. "I'll go shoo out the stray fam'ly."

Who do I find out in the front office, though, but Mrs. Pete Reynolds. I'd only seen her once before, when there was just one baby. She was dolled up kind of fancy then, and with her pink-and-white cheeks and her taffy-colored hair I remember thinkin' she was quite a stunner. But this draggly, limp female with a shawl over her head I wouldn't have recognized as the same party if she hadn't told me who she was.

"You don't say!" says I. "Well, what's wrong?"

"Pete," says she, a hopeless sag to her shoulders. "He—he no come back."

"The young rough-neck!" says I. "How long has he been gone?"

"Four, five days," says she.

Well, I planted her in a chair, with the baby on her lap and the little boy clingin' to her knees, and by degrees I got out of her the whole soggy story. Pete had gone to hittin' up the booze. It was a new trick for him, but at the café he'd got to travelin' with a cheap bunch

of rounders, sporty young clerks and so on, that he was friendly with, and he'd taken to showin' up at the flat about the time the milk was delivered, spendin' the day sleepin' it off.

Seems he'd been out of the real estate office for weeks, and finally he'd even lost his place at the Napoli. Meanwhile, the instalment people had taken back most of the furniture, and all their knick-knacks and glad rags had gone to the hock-shop. A threadbare old tale, but one I hadn't expected to hear about young Pete.

"I'd like to have him within reach for a few minutes," says I, bunchin' my fingers. "Him with such kids as these, too! Come here, little Pete; come along, now."

The little chap toddles over to me willin' enough, and I hoists him up on my knee for a good look.

"Say, he's some boy, eh?" I goes on.

Mrs. Pete gives me a grateful glance and smiles weary. Then I brushes back the yellow curls from the youngster's pink-and-white face, gets a view of them big dark eyes with the long back lashes and the cheek dimples, and lets him spring one of them cherub smiles on me, and—well, I just has to cuddle him up and let him coo in my ear.

"Ain't afraid of me; eh, little Pete?" I asks. "How's that?"

"Oo nice mans," says he, turnin' them big eyes on me.

"That settles it!" says I. "If that's the way you feel about me, that daddy of yours is goin' to have another chance. Looks like a hopeless job, Mrs. Reynolds, but we'll see what can be done. Just wait until I can get into my street clothes and——"

I breaks off when I sees Peabody Hatch standin' in the gym. door starin' at me.

"I beg pardon," says he.

"Don't bother," says I. "And say, you remember what I was tellin' you about the next generation? Well, here's one of the results. Have a look while I'm dressin'. Aw, don't be afraid. Clean as the inside of a new-laid egg. Catch him!"

I don't know whether Peabody ever had a strange four-year-old chucked at him that way before or not. I didn't stop to ask, but dropped little Pete in his arms and dashed into the dressin'-room.

Must have been there five minutes or more; but when I came back, there sits Hatch in my desk-chair, chattin' away chummy with the youngster.

"Oh!" says I. "Thought you'd gone. I didn't mean to give you a steady job."

"I—I don't mind a bit," says he. "Pete and I have just been getting acquainted. Haven't we, Pete? We are going to have a nice ride in the honk-honk, too."

"Eh?" says I, gawpin' at him.

"You were going to take them home, weren't

you?'' says he. ''Well, my car is outside. Let's see; Eleventh Avenue, did you say?''

Mrs. Pete looks at me to see if it's all right, and when I gives her the O. K. sign she nods.

And say, I don't suppose there's been a limousine stopped in that block before for a month. It's a rummy-lookin' double-decker we lands in front of, the fire-escapes draped with old beddin' and the street full of kids playin' tip-cat and jumpin' rope. But Peabody insists on luggin' the youngster up three flights of smelly stairs and into this barren two-room tenement at the back.

I hadn't said a word about this bein' the fam'ly of the young Italian I'd been describin' so enthusiastic, and I didn't mean to let on. Not a word. As we steps in, though, a slump-shouldered object lifts a pasty face from the bare table and stares at us. It's young Pete, and he's a sad mess.

''Huh!'' says I. ''Turned up again, did you? You're a fine specimen, you are! What you got to say for yourself?''

He sort of shivers and then slumps again, his head between his arms.

''Feelin' low, are you?'' I goes on. ''No wonder! But let's hear what alibi you got. Come, give some account of yourself.''

''I—I ain't any good, Professor,'' he whines. ''I didn't go for to stay off that way, but—but I got in with the old gang. That's what soured

the old man on me. He won't even take me on shinin' shoes along with him."

I glances at Peabody to see if he's made the connection. And he has.

"Oh!" says he. "This can't be the one you were telling me was such a——"

"You win," says I. "This is him. And I take it all back. I guess my proposition about the second generation was all wrong."

Next I turns to young Pete again and makes him state the exact situation. It's as bad as it looks. He's flat broke—nothin' in the house for the kids to eat, and the agent has served notice that he'll dump 'em out next Wednesday.

"Then what'll become of the wife and babies?" I asks.

"I—I don't know," says he dreary. "If you'd only give me another chance, Professor!"

"Yes, and how long would it be," I demands, "before you'd be runnin' with that bunch of tin-horns again?"

He just drops his chin.

"What you need, Pete," says I, "is to be introduced to some real work. That's what your old man was raised on. He's told me about it. Outdoor work, in the fields. Why, he dug ditches when he first came to this country. He didn't start in by wearin' yellow shoes and rainbow ties and tryin' to sop up all the red ink on Eighth Avenue. You're city-spoiled, that's what's the matter with you. Mostly my

fault, too. I should have shunted you out in the country, where most of your people belong, anyway. You ought to be there now. Your kids need it, too. But I suppose you wouldn't try livin' anywhere but in town."

"I—I'd try anything," he groans.

"Huh!" says I. "Wish I had a place to put you on. We'd see."

Then, when I was least expectin' it, Peabody speaks up.

"It happens that I have," says he.

"Wha-a-at?" says I. "One you can spare? Say, where is it?"

"I fear it isn't much of a place," says Peabody. "Just a little ten-acre tract with an old shack on it, 'way up in the Connecticut valley. I remember father sending one of our old gardeners up there on a pension. He's been gone several years, and the house has been shut up ever since. I've tried to sell it, even offered to give it away. It's rather an out-of-the-way place, I believe, and almost worthless as a farm, but if——"

"What do you say, Pete?" I breaks in. "Willin' to take a chance on it?"

"Anything to get out of this," says he.

"How about you?" I asks Mrs. Pete.

"I am country girl," says she. "I no like city, never."

"Then it's a go," says I. "Much obliged, Hatch. Give us the location, and to-morrow I'll take a day off and tow 'em out there."

"But see here," protests Peabody. "This farm, you know, is a mile or more from the nearest village. Why, they could starve out there and no one would know anything about it."

"They could starve just as easy here on Eleventh Avenue and nobody would care," says I. "Besides, I'm plannin' on doin' a little grub-stakin'."

"Hm-m-m!" says he, glancin' down at Little Pete, who's still holdin' him by the hand. "I think it would be decent of you to let me join in this—er—experiment. It's my farm, you know."

"But you don't believe much in the second crop," says I.

"I'm beginning to believe in the third, though," says he.

"Then you're 'most qualified to join," says I. "Let's get busy."

So by the middle of the next afternoon I've landed young Pete and his fam'ly a good two hundred miles from the nearest bottle of Chianti. Looked like it might have been a thousand after we'd left the train and been driven for an hour over hilly country roads.

And when we stops in front of this weather-beaten old house, with the windows boarded up and the front door almost choked by bushes, I don't blame Mrs. Pete for starin' around kind of wild.

It's on a back road, you know, and down in a

sort of a hollow where a brook runs through, with nothing in sight but bare, rocky fields all shut in by woods.

"Won't be bothered with neighbors, will you?" says I. "Come, Pete, let's unload these groceries and things."

While we was doin' that and pryin' the boards off the windows, Mrs. Pete goes wanderin' around with the youngsters.

It's a mild, early spring afternoon, with the green just startin' out on the trees, and if it hadn't been so still and deserted around the place it might not have seemed so forlorn.

"Course," I says to Pete, tryin' to chirk him up, "you got to rough it for a while. That won't hurt you any. What you can do to make a livin' here, though, is by me. That's up to you."

"I know," says he, sort of dull and desperate.

"Seems to be plenty of furniture, such as it is," I goes on, "and dishes and beddin'; and if you can only raise——"

"Pete! Pete!" we hears Mrs. Reynolds callin' excited. "Come, Pete!"

We thought something had happened to one of the kids, and out we dashed panicky. No; there they were down by the brook, all safe on the bank, and Mrs. Pete standin' beside 'em, wavin' her hands.

"See!" says she as we came up, pointin' to a bush. "For baskets! Willow wood! We

make fine baskets from him. I show you, Pete."

"There you are, right off the reel!" says I. "A home industry. I'll give you an order for half a dozen clothes hampers to start with."

"And look!" goes on Mrs. Pete, runnin' back from the brook a little ways and divin' into the soft black ground with her hands. "For celery. Nice dirt for celery."

"Is that so?" says I. "Sure about that?"

"Me, I show you nex' fall," laughs Mrs. Pete, her cheeks flushin' excited. "Celery and baskets. With place like that in the old country we make much money."

"Pete," says I, "I see where you got a swell business manager right in the fam'ly. You ain't going to starve. You're going to show the native-born how to go back to the land and not have the land go back on you. But you're goin' to develop a few new muscles."

"I'm willing," says Pete.

Before I left I got him to promise me a line now and then sayin' how they were gettin' on.

Well, he did send a couple of postals durin' the two months; but what he reports is so sketchy, and Peabody keeps askin' me so constant for details, that here the other day I just had to make a trip up there.

Honest, I hardly knew the place. Why, here was flowers growin', the shrubbery trimmed up, a fine big garden comin' along, rows and

rows of celery started, and in one corner of the kitchen is a reg'lar basket factory. You ought to see the change in them kids, too. Little Pete has grown inches, he's got roses in his cheeks, and the baby is fat as butter.

Pete, he's browned up and husky, and Mrs. Pete is gettin' to be more or less ornamental again.

I had planned to stay over only one train; but there's so much to see and talk about—the cow Peabody had sent up, and the chickens they was raisin', and the old white horse they'd bought on celery futures—that the first thing I know it's too late to get back that night. So I stops over.

And if either Pete or the wife was homesick for Eleventh Avenue, it didn't come out that evenin'.

After Mrs. Pete finishes the supper dishes she sits down and tackles the framework of a fancy lunch-hamper I'd brought specifications for, while Pete gets out his violin and proceeds to give the boy his daily lesson in handlin' the bow.

"He's goin' to be some player," says Pete. "Baby, too. Watch her."

She's sittin' up in her crib, beatin' time with her little pink fists and takin' it all in.

Afterwards Pete plays me a couple of Polish songs that Mrs. Pete had hummed for him, and she joins in with an old accordion. So altogether it was quite a jolly party we had.

When Peabody blows in next day he wants to know all about it.

"Well," says I, "it looks like the second crop was goin' to make good, after all. Our little transplantin' stunt seems to be turnin' out fine."

"Bully!" says he. "But, tell me, what are we raising up there?"

"Mostly willow baskets and assorted garden truck," I tells him; "but on the side I guess we're raisin' a young orchestra."

"Really!" says he. "Then that land can't be wholly worthless, can it, to produce such a variety of things?"

"Not with the right people on it," says I. "It's just a case of connectin' the second crop with the land to improve 'em both."

"Perhaps that's the answer to our big problem," says Peabody. "I'd like to see it tried extensively some day."

"Maybe you will," says I. "We ain't got the only bulgin' foreheads in captivity, you know."

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN STUFF PUT IT OVER

It begun with Sadie's gettin' interested in this Swede girl that comes to do her hair and put the piano-top effect on her finger-nails. Sadie used to take her hair and finger-nails to town, until one day this meek little ash blonde in the rusty black dress hails me as I'm swingin' off the afternoon express at Rockhurst.

"Please, sir," says she, "I find no Mees Wilburjones."

"Eh?" says I, whirlin' around to look her over. She looks scared.

"Mees Wilburjones," says she.

"Oh!" says I. "Wilbur-Jones? Why, they sold out and moved months ago. Went broke, you know—busted."

She stares at me puzzled. "I ban work for Mees Wilburjones," says she, "when I go by Sveden. My mudder she die; and Mees Jones he say I coom back, too."

"I see," says I. "Well, it's all off. If I was you I'd hike to the intelligence office and draw another address."

She listens wide-eyed and a bit stupid, and as I finishes she shakes her head. She explains

how she's just lent out all her cash to a steerage friend with a sick baby, and she displays a shabby little purse, as empty as a last year's robin's nest.

"Well, well!" says I. "On the rocks, ain't you? Come inside while I 'phone Mrs. McCabe and see if there's any vacant kitchen portfolios up at our house."

And Sadie, when she hears the details, gives me a decision right off the bat:

"Of course. Send her right out. She can help Mother Whaley with the children."

So inside of an hour Miss Olga Hansen is signed on as assistant nurse. And say, after Sadie's rigged her out in a white cap, shoulder-strap apron, and a pair of decent shoes, she's about as ornamental a nursemaid as you'd find anywhere.

Ornamental, but hardly useful. For instance, Mother Whaley'd start her givin' baby sister her bath, and an hour later she'd find Olga squattin' beside the crib, gazin' admirin' at the youngster rollin' on her back, and the bath water gettin' cold. As for her helpin' manage Sully—say, the way she'd let that kid rough-house her was a sin. Anything he demanded—from frosted cake in the middle of the night to havin' the dog put to bed with him—Olga would go trottin' for. Course, we couldn't stand for that. He's enough of a young tarrier as it is, without being humored.

It's just by accident that Sadie discovers

what an artist Olga is with a brush and comb. Then it develops she can do seventeen varieties of shampoo, execute a facial massage that's like havin' a happy dream, and handle the chamois buffer equal to any barber-shop queen.

"Why on earth didn't you say so before?" demands Sadie.

Olga shrugs her shoulders and gives her one of them stupid baby stares.

Course, in a small and select fam'ly like ours there wa'n't near enough hair-dressin' and manicurin' to keep an expert busy. Lendin' Olga out to Mrs. Purdy-Pell gave Sadie her grand idea. She 'phones around her callin' list, tellin' what a wonder Miss Hansen is, and inside of three days she's started her out with a complete outfit,—electric vibrator, little black bag, and date book,—and the first thing Olga knows she's earnin' twenty or more a week, easy money. Next she hires rooms in the village and opens a little shop for the carriage trade.

You'd 'most thought she was off our hands for good by then. Sadie insists, though, on keepin' close track of her, and durin' her Saturday calls she pumps out of Olga all the thrillin' details.

"What do you think, Shorty?" she announces one day. "Olga has a beau!"

"Good for Olga!" says I.

Sadie shakes her head. "I'm not at all sure what sort of a young man he is."

"Oh, leave it to Olga," says I.

"But she is such a simple, trusting soul," protests Sadie. "And, you know, she hasn't a single relative or friend in this country. I understand she comes from a very good family, too. Her father, she tells me, was a ship-builder, and she has an uncle who is captain of a steamer. Then, she's rather a beauty. I wish we could find out something about this young man of hers."

"Oh, come!" I says. "She ain't any first cousin of ours, you know."

I can't make her see it. She insists that havin' started Olga in on her manicurin' career, we are responsible for her.

"Even to who holds her hands evenin's?" says I. "Say, count me out. I ain't any public chaperon."

Sadie keeps bringin' it up every now and then, though, sayin' she hopes the girl ain't runnin' around with any worthless party, or worse.

"For the love of soup," says I, "why don't you ask Olga about him?"

"As though I hadn't!" says she. "All I can get out of her is that his name is Hickley, and that he says such funny things he makes her laugh all the time. Oh, yes, he's a lovely dancer, too; and he has told her that he's going to be rich."

"What more could you ask?" says I. "Entertainin', a swell trotter, and a bud-

din' plute! I should say Olga had drawn a prize."

Well, a month or so later along came this bulletin about how Olga had become an heiress. Fact! The captain uncle had shuffled off—not shipwreck or anything excitin'; ptomaine poisonin'. Anyway, his life insurance and a third int'rest in an old tub of a freighter had all come to Olga, his favorite niece. Near ten thousand in real money!

Course, there had to be more or less jugglin' with lawyers first. Twice I towed Olga into town to sign her name to things. It was on this second trip that I had a glimpse of a young gent stretchin' his neck after us from a doorway.

I'd looked over the papers, just to see that she wa'n't bein' bilked more'n usual, left her chewin' the pen-holder, and I was pikin' back for the Studio, when, as I steps out of the elevator, here's the neck-stretcher waitin' for me.

"Say," says he, messy, "wa'n't that Miss Hansen you was with a minute ago?"

"Good guess," says I. "What then?"

"I'm a friend of hers," says he. "That's why I'm crashin' in. What I'd like to know is, who the blazes are you?"

"Excuse me for not wearin' a tag," says I. "McCabe's my name."

"Oh!" says he. "Professor McCabe?"

"Right," says I. "And if it's in order, maybe you can do as much for me."

"I guess Olga's told you about me," says he. "I'm Hickley."

"Not *the* Hickley?" says I.

"Sure," says he.

So it's natural I looks him over a bit curious. A stocky, bullet-headed party he is, with plush-cut hair that grows down to a point in front, and a pair of bright brown pop-eyes.

"Yes," says I, "we've heard you described some. Kind of a humorist, eh?"

"Me?" says Hickley. "Nothin' to that. I'm no joke-book. I'm a business man."

"But Olga says you keep her laughing."

"Oh, her!" says he. "She laughs easy, Olga. And I expect I can pull a line of light chatter when I try. Some queen, that girl, Swede or no Swede. She's my best bet. I make a hit with her too, eh?"

"She says you're a swell dancer," says I.

"She's a judge," admits Hickley. "I got trot steps some of these exhibition ginks never dreamed of; just make 'em up out of my head. But I don't let any tango parties trip me up on business."

"Comin' strong, are you?" says I. "What firm you with down here?"

"Cole, Black & Matthews," says he.

"Well, well!" says I. "Solid people, they are. Let's see, you're——"

"Oh, I'm only on the quote board now," he cuts in. "You know—I put up the numbers as they come in off the ticker. Been at it three

years. Think of keeping me on a job like that! But say, between you and me, our people are a bunch of dead ones. They don't know talent when they see it. I've told 'em a dozen times how I was just bein' wasted on the board. I ought to be general manager by now. Honest! Why, I've put 'em on to schemes that would have— But I'll show 'em one of these days. I got the pipes all laid."

"Going to land a better job, are you?"

"Job? No," says he. "I'm goin' to put over something big; on my own, you understand. And say, take it from me, there's somebody home here;" and he taps himself on the bristly pompadour.

It was a shame, too, that Hickley had to get back to the office so soon, or I might have had full details of what a great man he was. Didn't mind tellin' me in the least.

I knew Sadie'd be interested to hear that I'd seen Hickley at last. She was.

"He's all right, I guess," says I. "Quite a lad."

"How do you know?" demands Sadie.

"Why," says I, "he—he confesses it."

"Humph!" says she. "Does he know about Olga's inheriting that money?"

"We didn't go into that," says I. "Mostly we stuck to the main subject—Hickley."

"What is Olga going to do with it?" asks Sadie.

"Put it in the Rockhurst National," says I,

"until she decides how to invest it. She's to meet me there in the mornin'."

"If Hickley doesn't see her first," says Sadie.

How do women do it, anyway? Can they sense things that we don't? Or are they just naturally more suspicious? I tried to show her she was crazy in the head. And then, one night, I comes home to find her waitin' for me with a high-tragedy look on her face.

"Well," says she, "that Hickley person has done it, just as I expected."

"Eh?" says I. "Done what?"

"Gotten all of Olga's money away from her," says she. "Every dollar, including what she had saved. He has been after her for the last week to turn it over to him—for investment, he says. And yesterday she did it. I pumped it out of her this morning. So now what do you think, Shorty McCabe?"

I'll admit too she had me with my mouth open, lookin' foolish. I looked more so after dinner, when Olga came up by request, and we had a little three-cornered session. Oh, yes, Olga admits it all, calm and cheerful. She'd drawn out her whole cash reserve and passed it over to Hickley without gettin' back so much as an I. O. U.

"Huh!" says I. "As a reward for makin' you laugh, or as a dancin' prize?"

Olga just blinks them cow eyes of hers.

"Meester Hickley he say he make very mooch

money," says Olga, "and then he coom back and—and——" Here she drops her chin kittenish.

"Yes; what then?" says I.

"We—we gets married," says Olga.

"You absurd, silly girl!" breaks in Sadie. "Don't you know that very likely you'll never see him again?"

"He coom back, Meester Hickley," insists Olga. "That what he say."

Well, what was the answer to that? Just on a chance of catchin' Hickley, I chased down to Cole, Black & Matthews' first thing next mornin'. One of the clerks gave me the tale.

"Stuff Hickley?" says he. "Oh, he jumped his job three days ago. He's a bird, that lad. Got an idea he's a young Napoleon of finance, you know. The firm is staggering under the blow, but we are managing to keep the doors open just as though nothing had happened. No, he didn't leave any address. Yes, I'll let you know if he ever shows up.

And that seems to finish the incident.

Two weeks later we get the next jolt. Sadie 'phones in the bulletin.

"Shorty," says she, "Olga's gone."

"Gone where?" says I.

"Goodness knows," says she. "Just disappeared. Last night sometime. Left nearly everything in her rooms. She must have been dreadfully worried. You don't suppose, Shorty, that she could have——"

"There's no telling," says I. "I'll call up the coroner's."

Not so cheerful, huntin' that kind of news. Nor little trips to the morgue.

"Sadie," says I, after a few days of that, "I don't often start any home reforms; but, believe me, from now on I'm off this Swedish philanthropy act for life."

"Poor Olga!" sniffs Sadie.

We'd closed the book on the tragedy and was tryin' to forget it, when here the other mornin' I gets another call on the wire and a familiar voice salutes chirky.

"That you, Professor?" it says. "Well, say, this is Hickley. . . . Uh-huh! Stuff Hickley, you know. Say, me and the Missus are up here at the Plutoria, doin' the honeymoon stunt like reg'lar parties. Only we're lonesome-like. Come up and feed with us, won't you?"

"Look here," says I. "What Missus is this you're talkin' about?"

"Why, Olga," says he.

"Then I'll come," says I.

Yep! It's the same Hickley, wearin' the same plush-cut hair on his bullet head, but sportin' a cutaway coat and yellow gloves, also one of these neckties with red, green, and orange stripes.

"Zing-g-g!" says I, shadin' my eyes. "Who you in mournin' for?"

"Who, me?" says Hickley. "That's the last thing I'm thinkin' of. Mournin' be blowed!"

"Where's Olga?" says I.

"Up in our suite," says he. "Get that? Three and bath, gold chairs, and a tub big enough to swim in. Come on up."

It's all he describes, that suite. As Hickley pushes me in, he sings out:

"Hey, girlie! Got 'em all on? Come show the Professor. Ah, there you are!"

Lucky I knew who to expect or I'd never guessed. She's Exhibit A, all right. Dolled? Say, the modest dressed little Olga we knew once looks as much like this one as a bunch of parsley does like an Easter lily in full bloom. Nothin' more'n black and white velvet and white fur, but there's all kinds of zip to it.

"Show him the boots, girlie," says Hickley. "Fur on 'em, too."

There was. And the skirt is plenty short enough not to hide the tops.

"Some Eskimo effect," says I, gaspin'.

"Such a lot for boots," says Olga, gazin' at 'em doubtful. "Eighteen dollars!"

Which reminds me of something. I pulls Hickley one side.

"Course," says I, "it's her money, and all that; and now you two are hitched you got a right to blow it as speedy as you please; but Olga can't depend on losin' an uncle every month, you know."

Mr. Hickley chuckles.

"Say, girlie," he calls out, "flash that new

bank book of yours on the Professor. He's uneasy in his mind."

And Olga produces a yellow pass book.

"See," says she. "He gets it all back for me."

It's a fact. Here's the ink hardly dry on a ninety-five-hundred-dollar deposit.

"This ain't her blow," adds Hickley. "It's mine. Goin' to last just five days more, too. Then we settle down in a nice little apartment on Riverside Drive. How? Say, didn't I tell you I was goin' to put over something big? Well, I landed. Ah, say, what else is there big money in nowadays? War babies. Sure! I saw the boom comin'. I was in on the ground floor, too. That was one of the things I wanted the firm to back me in. Why, I had a list of munitions industries and the stocks all located a month before the big buying began. Would the firm touch it? Not with a hay-rake! So I plunged on my own hook."

"Must have had an uncle up your sleeve yourself," says I.

"Not me," says Hickley. "But you don't think I handled the numbers all that time with my eyes shut, do you? I got to know a lot of the firm's good customers; and I always was a good guesser. So when I thought I had something good I passed it on, confidential-like. When they won I got my rake-off. Salted it, too. Say, one week there, back when New Haven was takin' a tumble, they fed me over

two hundred in tips just for puttin' 'em wise. And all I risked was my reputation. So I piled up quite a wad.

"But when I got the idea that these war stocks was goin' soarin'— Well, that was my own little private hunch. I wanted more'n just tips on that. I could smell profits—big profits. That's when I begun organizin' my pool. Uh-huh! Why not? I knew how it was done. And I had friends that I'd made good with. Ten of 'em came in, at five thousand apiece, agreein' to split fifty-fifty with me on the profits. And I put in my last dollar. Oh, sure, on margins. Handled it right there, through Cole, Black & Matthews, where I could watch it. J. T. Dobson, the account stood. Me, I was Dobson. Ten per cent. was all they made us put up at first. And inside of two weeks we had from twenty to thirty points velvet.

"Maybe you know what happened then. The big fellows got their eyes on war babies. They started a combine of their own, to shake out the small holders. Munitions stocks took a slump. The firm boosted the margins to twenty, thirty, forty per cent. Course, even then we could have pulled out with a fair profit. Some of 'em wanted to. But I wa'n't goin' to let that Bethlehem bunch throw a scare into me and hog all the kale. It was my one chance. Look at who I am, Professor. Know where I came from? An orphans' home over in Jersey. Ran away when I was sixteen, and had to

rush the ticket-chopper at Pavonia ferry to get to New York. Bootblack, newsie, errand-boy—that's my record. Then on the board at Cole, Black & Matthews. And at last I'd beat the game up to a point where I stood to win big stakes—enough to put me on my feet for good. There was Olga, too. I had to make good.

"That's when I quit my job and rustled. Day and night for three weeks I was at it, raising the coin to cover with. I hunted up everyone I'd ever known that had a spare hundred. And right when I thought I'd lost out I hears about this money of Olga's. I hated to do it, too. But she's a brick, Olga is. She believed in me. So—well, she let me have it. I covered and held on."

"They didn't shake you out, eh?"

"Not much!" says he. "And when war babies came back our pool cashed in half its holdings. Say, some of them stocks that I got around thirty I unloaded as high as one hundred and fifty. We had all we could swing, too. So I guess eighteen for a pair of boots ain't goin' to break me."

We swaps a grin at that.

"I expect you'll start buckin' the market like a reg'lar guy now, eh?" says I.

"Not me," says Hickley. "I'm goin' back with the firm."

"On the board?" says I.

"Hardly," says he. "They've found out who was runnin' that Dobson account, and how

it was done. So they're puttin' me in as manager of their uptown branch, just like I told 'em they ought to more'n a year ago. Twenty-five hundred to start with, and a commission on all business. Not so worse, eh? Let's go down and eat."

And say, maybe I didn't have a report for Sadie that night.

"Yes, yes," says I, windin' up; "you got to hand it to Hickley."

"Oh, well," says Sadie, "I'm glad I was wrong about him, for Olga's sake. I hope she's happy."

"Happy!" says I. "She can't dodge it. You ought to see them boots."

CHAPTER IX

ON THE SIDE WITH SILAS

After all, one of the best points about real life is that every now and then the schedule goes on the blink and things happen foolish and unexpected. Such as this batty affair I got mixed up in the other noon.

I'd been around to my fav'rite chop-house for lunch—just a triflin' little snack consistin' of a slab of shad roe decorated with strips of crisp bacon and a spray of water-cress, a fat baked potato snuggled up against it, with a hunk of rhubarb pie as a chaser. And, if you're askin' me, that's about as fine as they come, no matter who you are. I remarked as much to Fritz as I shoved over the tip, and he agreed with me cordial. Yes; with such paltry nourishment as that, I felt I could struggle through until dinner-time without goin' faint.

Maybe that's why Forty-second Street looked so calm and peaceful as I drifted back to the Physical Culture Studio. As a matter of fact, I expect it wasn't anything of the kind, for the cross-town traffic was snarled up, a gang of wreckers was tearin' the front off a five-story buildin' in the middle of the block, pavin' con-

tractors had a cement-mixer goin' a little further on, and the one o'clock rush back to the offices was in full swing. But I was serene and contented, especially under my belt, and I didn't notice anything but the sunshine.

A few doors from the Studio entrance I stopped to rubber in at a show window. Nothing but the same old display of electric irons and toasters that I've passed every day for months; but I hung up and gawped at it interested. If they'd had an outside barker they might have sold me 'most anything.

Then, all of a sudden, I looks up and sees this young mob surgin' down on me from Sixth Avenue way. Seemed to have oozed up through the sidewalk gratin's or been dropped off the roofs. I'd take oath there wasn't anything of the kind in sight a minute before.

But here was a bunch of men and boys swarmin' around, wavin' their arms, pushin', kickin', diggin' in with their elbows, and shoutin' frantic. It's a crazy-actin', wild-eyed, pantin' crowd, that sways and swings and revolves on itself, but all the time surges along, sweepin' the ordinary foot traffic one side, brushin' people into the gutters and doorways, like a thunder-storm scatterin' a Sunday-school picnic.

First off I couldn't make anything out of it at all; but finally I spots this short-legged old gent in the gray suit and gray felt hat who seems to be leadin' the bunch. That is, he was

in front, but walkin' backwards and sort of pushin' away them that was nearest to him.

A rummy-lookin' crowd it is, with hardly a clean shave or a fresh collar in the lot; but they all seemed greatly worked up over something or other.

"Hey, old sport!" a tall, lanky gink was shoutin'. "I didn't git one. You skipped me." "Gimme one, gimme one, mister!" yells another; and so on, until you could hardly hear yourself think.

And, the first thing I knew, the old gent has backed square into me, so solid I had to grab him by the shoulders to keep both of us from goin' down; and the next minute we're surrounded with dirty paws stretched out at us from all sides and clawin' our coat sleeves promiscuous.

As the old boy turns to see who's sharin' the center of the stage with him, I gets a better look; and, while he's a perfect stranger, there's something about his face—maybe that mildly worried look in his gray-blue eyes—that I kind of liked. Anyway, I decides offhand that I'm shinnyin' on his side.

"Want any help?" says I.

"Thank you," says he; "I—I would like to get out of this, if I can."

"Then stick close to me and drift along a few doors," says I. "That's it! Let 'em push. Here we are. Now! Duck behind and into this hallway. In you go!"

There's a grand howl too, when the old chap slips into the entrance to the Studio and the mob finds me blockin' the door. They don't hold any caucus or council of war, but proceeds to try rushin' me off my feet. But say, I ain't fond of actin' as door-mat in a place where I'm payin' rent. Not while my elbows are free. The next I knew, some of the leaders was wabblin' groggy on their hands and knees in front of the doorway, and the general ambition to walk over me sort of slackens.

"Sorry to mess up any of you enterprisin' hobos," says I, "but you shouldn't crowd in so enthusiastic. Now, I move you that this mass meetin' adjourn."

"Ah, send out the old geezer!" shouts someone from the far edge of the bunch. "Where's the old guy with the dollar bills?"

"Come in closer and you'll get the answer to that," says I. "Just push up within arm's length. Ah, come along!"

Maybe I wasn't cordial enough. Anyway, nobody seemed anxious to get in range, and when I steps out on the sidewalk to see if there ain't a cop within hail they scuttles off like so many rats.

In the hallway I finds the old boy leanin' sort of limp against the wall, with one hand to his side.

"Hello!" says I. "Feelin' a bit fluttery after the excitement?"

"It—it's nothing," says he. "My—my heart, you know. Pounding a little."

"Better come up to the Studio until it slows down," says I. "Here; lemme steady you. That's it. Easy does it."

While he's sippin' a glass of water and gettin' his blood pump regulated, I sizes him up curious. First off, I had him placed in the prosperous jay class—maybe a country banker, or owner of the big shingle works or a string of brick-yards. But somehow that don't fit, exactly. For one thing, there's too deep a tan on his neck and lower half of his face—the sort of color you find on these old boys who spend their winters on Southern golf courses. Then I spots the custom-made shoes and the manicured finger-nails, and I know he must be a plute of some kind.

Meanwhile he's been gazin' around, them calm, steady eyes of his travelin' from the pictures on the wall to the letterin' on the office door.

"Yes," says I. "That's me—Professor McCabe."

"Shorty, eh?" says he. "I remember now. I used to follow ring events when I wasn't too busy. I was in St. Louis the night you won the belt."

"Well, well!" says I. "Then we're almost acquainted."

"I'm Silas Rapp," says he, "of Rapp & Baker."

"Oh!" says I. "Rapp & Baker ranges, found in a million homes?"

He chuckles easy and nods. "They were good ranges when we made 'em," says he. "I can't say as much for the ones the trust is turning out to-day—fancier, maybe, with more nickel and frills. But we tried to make a stove that would cook things and last a life-time—not a kitchen ornament. I suppose I shouldn't find fault, though."

"Your dividends jumping every year, eh?" I suggests.

"It's scandalous, the money we're making," he says. "We don't know how to spend it. Look at Baker—with a Scotch castle! Bores him to death, you know. I'm not much better, though."

"Your fad is distributin' dollar bills to the multitude and gettin' yourself mobbed, is it?" says I.

Silas drops his chin sheepish.

"I don't quite understand yet how it happened," says he. "I've always felt sorry for those poor fellows on the park benches. To-day I took a sudden notion to help them. It seemed easy enough. I got a lot of ones from the bank, and went at it. Thought I was doing the job very quietly, too. Why, some of them were sound asleep when I tucked the folded bills into their hands, and——"

"For the love of Pete!" says I. "Is that the way you did it? No wonder you stirred

up the panhandlers. Why, don't you know you can block Broadway just by startin' to distribute samples of tooth paste or chewing gum? But openin' up a free kale dispensary in Bryant Park! Say, Mr. Rapp, you don't look as nutty as that. Perfectly sober too, I judge?"

That brings an uneasy squirm out of Silas, and he tints up some under the eyes.

"Then," says he, smilin' sarcastic, "a man who tries in his own way to help others is either drunk or insane, is he? It—it's a queer world."

"Now you've said a mouthful," says I. "Queer's the word. And the funny thing is that so few of us suspicion we're doin' our part to make it so. You and me, for instance."

If he'd been one of these chesty, touchy plutes that expects you to cross yourself every time they tap their check-books, our little confab would have ended right there, and likely as not he'd have gone out luggin' a grouch. I'd been willin', too.

But Silas Rapp ain't that kind. He's jolted, I can see. After a second, though, he gets a grip on himself and shoots over a shrewd, good-natured glance. After he's cut the end off a long, slim cigar, he opens up.

"McCabe," says he, "you've done me a good turn, a mighty good turn. I appreciate it. But I must say that I still consider myself neither foolish nor crazy. It's merely this: I have a lot more money than I need. I wanted to share a little of it with those unfortunates who do

need it so badly. Now, in Heaven's name, why shouldn't I?"

"Because they're bums, most of 'em," says I, "and they don't deserve help."

Silas rocks his head vigorous.

"No," says he. "You're wrong. No human being ever fell so low that he didn't deserve to be helped up. Besides, it isn't fair to call a man a bum just because you find him sitting on a park bench. I know, because I've been there."

"Ah, go on!" says I. "You?"

He stops to light the slim cigar, and gazes awhile at the smoke he puffs toward the ceiling.

"It was in Detroit," says he, "nearly forty years ago. I'd been working in a little foundry up in Alpena, and I had come down to the big city to make my fortune by selling a patent stove-damper that I had thought out. I was a raw, stupid-looking country boy. I suppose I looked even more stupid than I really was, for the city rather dazed me. Anyway, no one would let me explain about my new damper. They wouldn't give me a job in the pattern shops, either. So I sat on a park bench for two days and nights, hungry and discouraged."

"Until someone came along and slipped you a dollar?" I suggests.

"I wish someone had," says he. "It wouldn't have taken me long to find out that the tooth-and-nail theory of life ought to be left to the beasts. No; I could have starved right

there in public quite undisturbed. But I didn't. When I got desperate enough, I went back to a pattern shop where I had been all but thrown out, and offered to work for half pay. They fired an old fellow who'd been with them for years and gave me his place. I felt a little mean about it at the time, but I soon forgot. I was mighty busy. Evenings I whittled away at a model of my damper, and I perfected the Rapp oven.

"When I had saved up enough to take out patents on the whole thing, I went to a rival concern and made a deal with them to put it on the market. Baker was foreman there. He saw the possibilities of the Rapp range at once, and talked over the directors. It was Baker, too, who advised me to take my pay in shares instead of cash. So I divided with him. We put our dividends back into stock. Inside of ten years we had control and were starting out on that campaign of ours—'Rapp & Baker Ranges in a Million Homes.' Well, we did it, and more. And here I am."

"Yes," says I; "here you are, almost creatin' a riot because you don't know how to spend your money."

"I suppose you could tell me just how it ought to be done?" says he.

"I don't know anything easier," says I. "Seems to me I'd hunt up all my relations and give 'em a good time."

Silas hunches his shoulders.

"I tried that," says he. "Three summers ago I got them all together—nearly thirty of 'em—at my big Michigan farm on the lake shore. I built a twenty-room annex on to the house especially to accommodate 'em, bought five automobiles and half a dozen motor-boats, laid out tennis courts and croquet grounds, and hired an orchestra for the season.

"But it didn't work. Not one of 'em was satisfied. Cousin Kate left because Cousin Emma had a private bath and she didn't. Uncle Tom's boys scrapped with Aunt May's youngsters. The young folks wanted to dance all night, and the old people wanted the place quiet after nine o'clock. Everyone bossed the servants, until half of 'em quit. Then my twin nephews came down with measles, and there was a grand howl to have them sent away.

"Before the season was over I was half-crazy. Never again! I had the annex torn down, and I've arranged a family pension list which bars visiting. No more family reunions for me, thank you. Living with sister Sarah is bad enough. I've sort of got used to her, though. You see, since Mrs. Rapp died, she—well, Sarah has kind of taken me in charge."

"An old maid, is she?" I asks.

"Double and twisted," says Silas. "Set in her ways, too. Doesn't believe in private charity, for one thing. Wouldn't she raise a row about this, though, if she knew. So whenever I do anything of the kind it's on the quiet.

That's why I slipped into town to-day without letting her know. You see, I wanted to look up something I started a couple of weeks ago. It's a little odd, but I think I've found a way to be of help to a lot of people. I—I'd like to tell you about it, McCabe."

"Shoot," says I.

Well, it seems he'd run across an ex-chauffeur of his who was driving a motor-truck for a wholesale house and living over on the East Side with his fam'ly—a fellow by the name of Jenkins. Bright, enterprisin' chap, accordin' to Silas. He'd organized some sort of club over there, kind of an independent Cooper Union on a small scale, where they had speeches and lectures and so on. But all they could afford to hire was a hall over a beer saloon, and the speakin' was interrupted by waiters takin' orders.

"So I leased an old dance-hall," says Silas, "had it fitted up a little, and paid the rent for a year in advance. Anonymously, you understand. Even Jenkins doesn't know who did it. But it's free for them to use seven days in the week. I hear they're having some sort of meeting there this afternoon—helpful addresses to the unemployed, I believe. I thought I'd like to drop around and see how the scheme is working out. I hate sneaking in alone, though. Won't you come along, too?"

Well, I wasn't crazy about it, but he urged so hard that I went. And say, Silas had done

the thing up in good shape—seats for several hundred, reg'lar orchestra chairs; a big speakers' platform; plenty of flag decorations; and a sign over the door announcin' that this was "The East Side Public Forum, Admission Free."

The place was about half-full when we wandered in. A short, squatty gent with a heavy crop of grizzly gray hair was holdin' forth on the brotherhood of man or some guff like that. It was kind of a vague, ramblin' talk, and he wasn't holdin' the crowd very well, when a tall, dark-eyed younger man walks out with a watch in his hand. Silas nudges me.

"That's Jenkins," says he. "Looks as if he was running the show."

He was, too. He proceeds to choke off the brotherhood-of-man guy neat and prompt, sayin' there was other speakers waitin', and then he launches out on a few remarks of his own. He starts in mild enough, but he soon begins shootin' it over hot and spicy and wakin' up the audience.

"You can talk about the brotherhood of man," says he, "until you're black in the face, but it won't get you anywhere. It's a nice, pleasant, silly dream. If you think it will work, ask John D. Rockefeller to join you. Ask any capitalist. That's what's the matter with this country—too many millionaires. We have to make 'em and support 'em, you and I. We have to work our souls out to build

up their great fortunes, to give 'em places to live in. And they don't care a hoot for us, not one of 'em. They hardly know we exist.

"Big or little, they're all the same. They've got us chained down by their trusts, and if we don't keep on working for 'em they shoot us, or put us in jail, or let us starve. They own the judges and the legislatures and the army. That's their idea of a perfectly good brotherhood. I'm not telling you things I've read. I've been the slave of a capitalist myself. Silas Rapp, if you want to know—Rapp, the stove king. What's he got to do with you, eh? Why, every time your wife cooks dinner on the kitchen range you're paying tribute to Silas Rapp. And he's a greedy, selfish, soulless old wretch who has ground his millions out of our working people without caring whether they——"

"Say," I whispers to Silas, "your friend seems to be handin' it to you kind of rough. Want to hear the rest?"

"No," says Silas, edgin' toward the aisle. "I—I think I've heard enough."

Seems sort of stunned and dazed, Silas does; he don't say another word until we're two blocks away. Then he lets out a groan.

"So that's what I get!" says he. "From Jenkins, too! And they were all with him. You heard them applaud?"

"Sure," says I. "They're always strong

for the hate stuff. I expect, now he's made such a hit, he'll be usin' you as a horrible example right along. Unless you shut up the joint and throw 'em all out."

"I won't do that," says Silas. "No, I've just made another fool mistake. I'll let it go. Let them keep on learning to hate me. Perhaps it's what I deserve."

"Ah, come; buck up, Mr. Rapp!" says I. "You don't mean that."

"Why not?" says he. "Haven't I made a mess of things all around? I'm only fit for money-grabbing, I guess. Whenever I try to do any good with it, I make people wretched. And now—now they're being taught to hate me!"

The old boy has his chin down and his lip is quiverin'. Honest, he was takin' it hard. It's kind of pitiful, too, watchin' him; for it's easy enough to see he's one of these sensitive, thin-skinned parties that likes to have folks think well of him. And hearin' himself roasted in public that way had taken the heart right out of him. There's a hunted, desperate look in them kind old eyes of his. No tellin' what he was thinkin' of doin' next.

Well, administerin' first aid to plutes that's had their feelin's hurt was a new line for me, but I couldn't help feelin' sorry for Silas. So I does my best.

"Ah, come!" says I. "If you think you're the only one that ever mis-cued on the philan-

thropy stunt, you ain't well posted. Why, every big scheme of that kind you can name, from Carnegie's library fund down, is knocked constant and generous by the very ones it's meant to help. I don't know why, but it's so. Check-book charity ain't popular. It's human nature, I expect. Most of us feel that way. Do you cheer every time you see a bread line or pass a soup kitchen? I don't. I can't help thinking that something's wrong somewhere."

"Then," says Silas, "you agree with Jenkins about me?"

"That don't follow," says I. "Jenkins is just a sore-head. He don't think—he feels. All he can see standin' between him and the things he wants is you."

"I know," says Silas. "Perhaps he's right."

"Say, you give me an ache," says I. "Look here. Did you invent the business game as well as the cook-stove? Not much. You found it all laid out, and you played it accordin' to the rules. Near as I can figure out, you've always played it on the level, too. And you happened to make your pile at it. So why are you to blame if others missed out? If any of us don't like the results, it seems to me we're wastin' time hatin' you for that. Our cue is to get together and revise the rules of the game.

"By gum!" says Silas, slappin' his knee. "I never looked at it just that way. I—I be-

lieve there's something in that, McCabe. I'm much obliged to you."

"Help yourself," says I. "Givin' off my opinions on things I don't know much about is the easiest thing I do."

"You're right, though," he goes on. "The rules ought to be changed. But I couldn't say how."

"Me, either," says I. "I don't let the fact get me panicky, though. I go on playing the game and gettin' as much fun out of it as I can."

"I wish I could," says Silas. "Anyway, I mean to quit trying fool experiments. There's only one other thing I'd like to do. I wish I had the courage to tackle it."

"What's that?" says I.

"I'd like to raise pigs," says he, solemn and earnest.

"Pigs!" I gasps.

"Yes," says he. "When I was a boy we always had a litter or two around the place every spring. I used to think a lot of those little black and white rooters, with their pink snouts and their funny little eyes and their curly tails. What can be cuter or more comical? It may seem odd to you, but ever since I got out of active business I've had a hankering to go back to Michigan, settle down on my farm, and raise pigs by the hundred."

"Mr. Rapp," says I, "if you're askin' my permission, here you are. Go to it."

"By gum, I will!" says he. "And sister Sarah can just lump it."

We shakes hands on the proposition, and off he goes. I gets back to the Physical Culture Studio about closin' time, and finds Swifty Joe more or less peeved.

"Ahr-r-r-r chee!" says he. "Why didn't you tip me off this was a half-holiday? Been down to Coney, have you?"

"No, Swifty," says I. "Nothing so happy as that. I've been out sympathizin' with the idle rich and steerin' a poor plute back to the pigs."

"Ahr-r-r chee!" says Swifty, indicatin' disgust. And with that he beats it for South Brooklyn.

It was a pleasant afternoon, though, even if I didn't lay up a cent.

CHAPTER X

A RINGER IN THE GRACCHI

"NOTHING doing, Sadie," says I. "I may be simple in the head and all that, but——"

"Now, see here, Shorty McCabe," breaks in Sadie, "listen to me a moment, will you?"

Course, I'd made up my mind when the plot of the piece was first flashed on me; and I'd stated my position prompt. I had no idea of reversin' it, either. Just to humor her, though, I lets her go on and sketch out the details.

This was to be a benefit affair for the poor Serbs, that everyone is so sorry for—when they can spare the time and somebody else is listenin'. It was to be a Pageant of Ancient Rome, chiefly because the costumes could be faked up easy and the groups made so picturesque.

"Whose grand and noble scheme is this?" I asks.

"Why," says she, "Mrs. Boomer-Day is getting it up."

"Huh!" says I. "Then that lets me out on two counts. First off, she wouldn't have me in anything she was runnin', and, even if she would, I——"

"Which shows just how you jump at things,"

says Sadie. "Now, as a matter of fact, Mrs. Boomer-Day particularly wants you to take part. She was over here for an hour this afternoon telling me about it. She thinks you'll be perfectly splendid."

"Me?" says I. "As what?"

"Why, as a gladiator," says Sadie.

"Hel-lup!" says I.

"About all you'll need," goes on Sadie, "will be a sword and a shield."

"Mrs. McCabe," says I, registerin' dignified horror, "if you think I'm goin' to prance around in public draped mainly in a tin shield and a bloodthirsty look, you got another guess comin'. Not for all the sufferin' Serbs you could tell about in a week. Ain't I seen them whitewashed gladiator groups they used to have in the circus? Why, they didn't even wear enough to pass inspection at a Turkish bath; and as for——"

But Sadie chokes me off with a sofa cushion, and when she gets through her snickerin' fit she explains that the circus style of gladiator wasn't just what Mrs. Boomer-Day had in mind. She shows me a picture of one they'd dug up somewhere; and, while the costume was scant, it did call for something more than a seamless union suit. But, at that, a gladiator's full evenin' dress ain't much more'n what I used to wear in the ring. I shakes my head.

"I can't see myself doin' it," says I. "Why

not cast Pinckney for that part—or Purdy-Pell?"

"This isn't burlesque, you know," says Sadie. "And Mrs. Boomer-Day insists that you are about the only man in Rockhurst who would look anything like a gladiator. So don't be selfish. Everyone who has been asked so far has promised to help. I don't care about doing it any more than you do, but——"

"What's she got you down for?" I asks.

Sadie looks a bit foolish.

"As a Roman matron," says she. "Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi."

"Mother of which?" says I.

Well, accordin' to her, this Cornelia dame was one of the old Roman smart set who made a fad of not decoratin' herself with tiaras and ear danglers and bracelets and such things. And once, when she was bein' kidded about it, she calls in her two little boys, strikes an art-gallery pose with an arm around each, and remarks mushy, "These are my jewels." She must have had a good press-agent, for the tale is still printed in the history books.

"Little Sully is to be one of my boys," says Sadie, "and the other will be Mrs. Boomer-Day's Harold."

"Good night!" says I. "Harold Vincent! He'll make a hot young Roman, he will. That peevish little shrimp! Couldn't you find anybody better'n him to mate up with Sully?"

"It was Mrs. Boomer-Day's suggestion," says Sadie.

"Oh!" says I. "Now I get the idea."

Not that I want to knock any of the neighbors; but this Boomer-Day person is one party I never could stand for, as maybe I've mentioned before. I don't mind so much her bein' built like a sack of bran; she can't help that altogether, I expect. And maybe she ain't to blame for her voice, that's about as squawky and high-pitched as a poll parrot's.

But when it comes to a female of her shape, with a disposition like a settin' hen and about as much brains, tryin' to play herself as a social queen and gettin' green-eyed every time she thinks she ain't treated as such—well, that's what gets my angora.

And the fact that she once referred to me as "that impossible person" ain't got a thing to do with it. I hope I am, so far as she's concerned. That's my aim in life.

This scheme of hers to get Harold Vincent into the limelight is right in line with what she's always up to. Course, that's only part of it. Anybody that knows her well can tell you that her sympathy for the Serbs is all bunk. What she cares most about is Mrs. Boomer-Day. But it's easy to see where she means to let herself in on this. She's goin' to boss the show—goin' to pull if off on the Boomer-Day estate, in fact; and whatever readin' notices are

printed about the affair will carry her name at the top.

It's a wonder, too, she ain't cast herself for some star act as well. Someone must have given her the hunch that she didn't have quite the figure for exhibition work. So she gives out that being business manager will keep her from goin' on in costume or anything like that. But she finds a prominent place for dear Harold on the program.

With him livin' right in the neighborhood and bein' about the same age as little Sully, we've seen more or less of Harold Vincent. He's a pampered pet, for one thing—the sort of little darling that throws himself on the floor and howls when he don't get what he wants. His favorite salute to strangers is runnin' his tongue out, and his chief pastime seems to be to bully his governess. A governess at the Boomer-Days', by the way, usually lasts about three months, although some can't stand Harold Vincent that many weeks.

Oh, a sweet little fellow! You ought to hear Sully's opinion of him.

"Always wants to boss me around," says Sully. "Thinks he's such-a-much, too, 'cause he's two years older and an inch taller'n me. Huh!"

But in some ways Sadie's easy worked. She lets herself be talked into this pageant proposition and then proceeds to get after me.

"Didn't I say I wouldn't?" says I.

"Now, Shorty——" she begins. And about twenty-two minutes later we arrives at the usual compromise. That is, I won't do it for Mrs. Boomer-Day. Not on your life. But on Sadie's account and for the good of the cause —well, I'll think it over.

"Lemme see what sort of a holy show I'll be in that outfit first," says I. "You get it together and put it in my room; then some night, after the doors are all locked, I'll try it on."

Meanwhile Mrs. Boomer-Day breezes ahead with the arrangements. You got to hand it to her, too, she's some organizer. Course, the real Roman stuff, plannin' the groups and costumes and scenery, is all handled for her by a professional, a lady pageant expert who's willin' to do the Serbs, or any other distant sufferers, a good turn providin' she gets forty per cent. of the gate receipts.

But when it comes to ringin' in unwillin' performers, holdin' people up to buy tickets at five a throw, and workin' the newspapers for free space, Mrs. Boomer-Day is right on the job. You should see the classy list of patronesses she gets together—all the swell people in this part of Westchester County. And she must have hypnotized Boomer-Day into unlimberin' his check-book, for that circular grand-stand affair she had built back of her rose gardens couldn't have been put up for less than a couple of thousand anyway.

"It's supposed to be a model of the old Circus Maximus in Rome," explains Sadie.

"I suspicioned I was down for a clown act," says I. "Am I expected to think up my own gags? And say, how long do I stand there with that two-edged cheese-knife in my hand?"

I found out. After they put up the stage all the actors had to go over to the Boomer-Days' a couple of times for rehearsal.

The lady director gives me pointers on holdin' my shield and how to strike an attitude.

"Just imagine," says she, "that you have disabled your antagonist. You have him down, your foot on his neck——"

"Wha-a-at!" says I. "And have the referee call a foul on me?"

She explains how these ancient carvin' affairs, got up to amuse the dear people, was run without any ring rules. It was a case of anything to put your man out, and when you got him in the dirt you held him there while the audience took a straw vote as to whether or not you got the signal to finish him off.

"And there you are," she goes on, "shield up, sword ready, your eyes lifted to the censor's box, watching to see which way he turns his thumb."

"Them was the good old days—not," says I. "But I've stood over many a lad while he took the count. I'll think of that while I'm practicin' this business on a sofa cushion."

"Oh, I'm sure you'll do it beautifully," gushes the lady expert.

Even Mrs. Boomer-Day purrs around enthusiastic.

She's a shifty dame, Mrs. Boomer-Day. When she's workin' you for anything she can be smoother than the inside of a banana peel. Why, you'd think we'd been life-long chums, to listen to her callin' me "Professor dear"; and the line of jolly she hands Sadie was sweet enough to be put in cans and labeled maple syrup.

She calls up on the 'phone about four times a day, consultin' Sadie about this or that; borrows a lot of our rugs and potted plants; and declares she don't know how she could ever get through this thing if it wasn't for us.

"Oh, well," says Sadie, "she *is* good-hearted, you know."

"Ye-e-es," says I a bit doubtful, but at the same time more'n half-buffaloed myself.

So, on the Saturday of the big show, when she rings up to ask a special favor, we're about ready to fall for anything.

Seems she's got one of the Sunday editors to send out a staff photographer, and she wants a special group taken of Sadie and Sully and Harold Vincent.

"But things are in such confusion here," she goes on, "that we are coming over there to have it taken. And I want the man to get a good one

of the dear Professor at the same time. May we come?"

"Why, to be sure," says Sadie.

Who could have mistrusted there'd be any consequences to that? Not me. I was busy upstairs bucklin' on a pair of open-work gladiatin' boots, and tryin' to drape that sword harness on me so it wouldn't trip me when I tried to walk like an ancient Roman. Sadie was in front of the pier-glass, adjustin' the hang of her cheese-cloth robes; and Sully, who'd been paradin' around in his toga effect most of the forenoon, was down in the side yard showin' off to Pasquale, the gardener's youngster.

About then the Boomer-Day limousine rolls up, with Mrs. Boomer-Day and Harold Vincent inside the car, and the camera man sittin' up front with the chauffeur.

Sadie chases down, and the two women get to fussin' with her dress, while the photographer scouts around for a good background and sets up his machine. Looked like he had his orders, for while the rest of us are gettin' ready he proceeds to take close-ups of Harold Vincent in seven different poses. And the first thing I know, I hears this debate open in the yard outside:

"Go away. You're not in this. What are you doing around here anyway? Clear out, now."

It's the sweet voice of Harold Vincent, and I take it he's addressin' Pasquale.

"Aw, let him stay," protests Sully. "He ain't hurtin' anything, is he?"

You see, boys of Sully's age are sort of scarce in the neighborhood, and as little Pasquale often comes over with Dominick him and Sully plays together a lot. I expect we should have discouraged that sort of thing, but somehow we never have.

Maybe you don't remember, but he arrived the same day Sully did, and we've always taken quite an interest in him. Besides, he's a clean, well-behaved boy, Pasquale, and as bright as they come. Him and Sully gets along fine, too; but Harold Vincent has always turned his nose up at him. Just now he seems to be specially peevish.

"I'm not going to have him around, that's all," he announces. "Dirty little Dago."

"Hey, you quit that," Sully pipes up. "You needn't be callin' him names."

"Will if I want to," says Harold Vincent. "I'll chase him off, too."

"You just dast!" says Sully.

And at that I moves over to the window, where I can get a better view and decide about how far this hostile talk ought to run. It's quite a picture too, these two youngsters in their Roman togs, bristlin' up to each other, with little Pasquale standin' wide-eyed in the background.

Harold Vincent tops Sully by half a head, bein' a weedy, long-legged lad, while Sully is short and stocky. But Sully is braced up to him menacin', with his fists bunched.

"Here, here!" I sings out.

They're too excited to listen, though.

"Pooh!" says Harold Vincent, glarin' haughty. "I'll show you. Watch."

Then he steps over to Pasquale and hands him a slap.

"Clear out!" he tells him. "Dirty little——"

But that's as far as he gets. The next I saw was a rush on Sully's part, and he was landin' a right and left on Harold Vincent's map, just the way I've taught him to do on me when we have our practice bouts with the little set of gloves I got for him.

I don't wait to see any more, but beats it down the back way, with that blamed sword thing rappin' my knees at every jump.

By the time I can get there, one noble little Roman is down on the grass, and the other is sittin' on his chest pumpin' in the half-arm jolts for all he's worth.

"Hey, you young tarrier!" I calls. "Break away, will you?"

Would he? Why, I had to pry that little rascal's fingers loose from Harold Vincent's hair, and then hold him at arm's length while I shook the fight out of him. And when I got

him quieted down I turns to the darling of the Boomer-Day household.

He's some mess. A little stream of claret is tricklin' from his nose, and the cheek under his left eye is swellin' up rapid. Also he's scared stiff.

"Take him away!" he pants. "Take him off!"

"Yes, yes, son," says I, liftin' him up. "It's all right. You're safe now."

I was soothin' him down and leadin' him towards the nearest lawn faucet, when he puts his fingers to his face and gets sight of the gore. Then he cuts loose with the howls. He'd been more dazed than hurt before, I expect, but when he finds his face bloody he just naturally gets panicky. And you could have heard them yells half-way to the station.

Course, that brings the women out on the run. At the first glimpse of Harold Vincent's face, Sadie grabs him in her arms and dashes to the faucet, while Mrs. Boomer-Day simply throws up her hands and squeals.

"Oh, my darling boy!" says she. "What has happened to my darling Harold?"

Maybe if she'd given me a chance I'd have told her right then and had it over with. But she keeps on squawkin' so nobody could get a word in if they tried.

Meanwhile Sadie washes off the gore and bathes the swellin'.

"What was it, Harold dear?" demands Mrs. Boomer-Day. "What happened?"

I was bracin' myself for the grand explosion and tryin' to make up my mind how to meet it. Believe me, it was no easy thing to settle off-hand, either. She'd probably insist on my thrashin' Sully then and there. But, while I couldn't deny he was some to blame, still it wouldn't be hardly a square deal to warm him for handin' Harold Vincent no more'n what was comin' to him.

"Now, darling," cooes Mrs. Boomer-Day, "tell me just what happened to you."

Harold Vincent squirms loose from Sadie and straightens up. He gives a quick glance at Sully and one at me. Then he comes out with his whopper.

"I fell," says he.

"Fell?" says his mother. "How?"

"Out of that," says Harold, pointin' to the lawn swing near by.

And say, that unexpected move of his almost got my breath. I was lookin' for him to unload a harrowin' tale of unprovoked assault—how he wasn't doin' a thing when Sully jumped on him with a club. But instead he springs this pleasin' fiction about the swing. Does it convincin', too. Anyway, he gets by with it.

"What a shame!" says Sadie.

"My poor darling," murmurs Mrs. Boomer-Day, foldin' him in sympathetic.

Maybe at that point I should have stated the facts in the case and let Sully take his share of the blame. But what a ruction it would have raised! So I merely steps up and pats Harold Vincent on the shoulder.

"Harold," says I, "you're a good sport. And we'll have you fixed up in half an hour so you'll be almost as good as new."

But Mrs. Boomer-Day insists that her darling must not be seen with his face looking like that. No pageant for him.

"But we can not give up the Gracchi group," says she. "We simply can't. If some other boy could only be found!"

"Never mind," says Sadie. "We have nearly two hours; I'll find someone. You take Harold right home and attend to him. Send his costume back by the chauffeur, if you will."

Looked like kind of a rash promise, for when they'd gone Sadie turns to me and asks: "Shorty, who can we possibly get?"

"I pass it up," says I scratchin' my head.

At which Sully comes in with the question.

"Why can't Pasquale be in it with me?"

"Why, that's so!" says I. "Why not?"

Sadie hesitates a minute.

"In—in Harold's place?" says she. "Would Mrs. Boomer-Day like that, do you think? But, really, I don't see why Pasquale wouldn't do. And then, there's no one else."

"He's the real thing, you know," says I. "Look at him."

"Why, so he is," says Sadie, starin'.

And say, when we got him into that white toga affair, with his curly black hair rumpled up picturesque, and his big smilin' brown eyes opened wide, and his white teeth showin'—well, take it from me, him and Sully made a pair you wouldn't mind exhibitin' anywhere. As for Sadie, I don't know how near to lookin' like this Cornelia party she comes, but if Corny had anything on her, then Rome was lucky.

"Well, well!" says I, as she gathers one of the youngsters under each arm and does a pose for me. "That's some picture all right. If that don't win the gallery I don't know what will. And say, I'm goin' to smuggle Dominick in some way, so he can see it."

I did, too.

So that's how it happened that in place of the Boomer-Day heir bein' exhibited before this swell push that had been collected, there was a perfectly good young Roman who looked and acted the part like he'd been born to it; while from a back upper window the petted Harold Vincent peeks out of one eye at the show, and probably wonders why such things should be allowed. It's the Gracchi group that gets the big applause, too.

And a couple of hours later, after the thing was all over and I'd had a heart-to-heart talk with Sully on the evils of lettin' your temper slip, I runs across Dominick. His face is all shiny and he's brushin' a joy tear off his nose.

"Leetla Pasquale," says he, "he—he no so bad, eh?"

"He made the hit of the day, Dominick," says I. "Some boy, that!"

But say, maybe you noticed the pictures of the Serbian Benefit Pageant printed in one of the Sunday papers? No? Well, the biggest cut of all was labeled, "One of the Gracchi, as impersonated by Master Harold Vincent, son of Mr. and Mrs. Boomer-Day."

"Huh!" says I, pointin' it out to Sadie. "Couldn't spill her if you tried, could you?"

CHAPTER XI

KRITT AND THE LADY HOLSTEINS

THERE'S times when I wish I had a job in a signal tower, or at a ticket window—some place where people pass quick and are shot along before you get to know too much about 'em. You might not think, either, that runnin' a physical culture studio would rub you so close to folks. But some way it does. And say, the closer you see 'em, the more you need to be able to grin. Take Forbes Latham.

He's a young plute that Pinckney tows in because he'd found him dinin' on crackers and milk at the club. A tall, keen-eyed party, this Mr. Latham, with a serious, stand-offish air. But Pinckney don't let that affect his frivolous nature.

"Behold Shorty," says he, "a war-battered hero."

"Oh, I say!" protests Mr. Latham.

"Fact!" insists Pinckney. "If it wasn't for the war you'd still be a normal human being, available for week-ends occasionally. As it is, you spend your time signing contracts to produce high explosives at a profit that ought to make you feel like a pickpocket. It's making so much money that he doesn't

need, Shorty, which has brought him to this state."

"Rubbish!" says Latham. "I'm perfectly fit, I tell you."

"With no appetite, and sleeping but three hours a night!" goes on Pinckney.

"A little touch of nerves, perhaps," admits Latham.

He being a friend of Pinckney's, I soaks him my top price and arranges a session that makes him think he's gettin' his money's worth. In a week or so Mr. Forbes Latham has worked up an appetite for real food and is hittin' the floss reg'lar. Also his ego ain't so prominent. He tells me he means to keep on trainin', while business is so strenuous, anyway.

"It's rather a strain," says he, "and I am depending on you, Professor, to pull me through—on you and my Holsteins."

"Your which?" says I.

Then he proceeds to tell me about his model dairy farm up in Connecticut. It's his big hobby.

"I'll bring up some photos of my new buildings," says he, "and one or two of Lady Blanche de Nimours."

"If she's one of them cigarette-smokin' foreign dames," says I, "take my advice and duck."

But it seems Lady Blanche is only the pride of the herd, with a milk-givin' record that I forget.

Every time we come to a breathin' spell he'll drag in that dairy farm of his and try to pin me down to a date when I'll go out and inspect it.

That's what he was at one afternoon when Swifty comes into the gym and reports a stranger in the front office.

"Rummy-lookin' gink, too," says Swifty.

"Then sweep him out," says I. "Want me to do the janitor work, do you?"

"Ahr-r-r-r, chee!" says Swifty. "Wot's the use gettin' messy? Didn't I say how he wants to see Mr. Latham?"

"Me?" says Forbes. "What name?"

"Wouldn't give any," says Swifty.

"Oh, well!" says I. "I'll go."

And say, Swifty ain't exaggerated any. What I find standin' sort of limp and wavery in the front office is a sorry-lookin' specimen. I expect before his cheeks caved in he was one of these square-heads. He has a young-old look, anywhere between twenty-five and fifty, and there's a weary, hopeless sag to his shoulders. Not the kind of caller Forbes Latham would want to see.

"Who put you next to his being here?" I demands.

"I—I happens to see him comin' up a while ago," says the stranger. "I waited downstairs for a spell. Then it—it took me some time to climb the stairs. My—my wind."

"Huh!" says I. "What's the name?"

"Kritt," says he.

"Swell monicker," says I. "Well, Kritt, what do you want of Mr. Latham?"

"I—I just want to see him, that's all," says Kritt.

"How interestin'!" says I. "Think he wants to see you?"

Kritt ain't sure of that.

"Then you'd better check out," says I. "Try at his office to-morrow."

Kritt stares at me sort of dumb and wooden, but he makes no move to go.

"I—I got to see him to-day," says he.

Well, we debates that point four or five minutes. Then I gives up.

"I'll ask Mr. Latham," says I. "He must be dressed by now. Wait here."

But when I describes the party to Forbes, and tells the name, he says he never heard of any such guy.

"Let's see what the fellow's like," says he, and follows me into the next room.

One look and he turns away disgusted.

"Never saw him before," says he. "Send him off."

I've always got more curiosity than sense, though, in such cases. I has to go on askin' questions.

"See here, you," says I. "What do you mean, trailin' in here after a stranger?"

"I know *him,* all right," insists Kritt. "Worked for him more'n a year."

"Oh!" says Latham. "One of the hands, eh? It's possible. Where were you?"

"In the tolly shop," says Kritt.

"I see," says Latham. Then he turns to me. "Their name for trinitrotoluol. Tolly! Rather good, eh?"

"Easier on the tongue," says I. "But what's the rest of it, Kritt? Were you fired, or what?"

"I got the sickness," says he—"the tolly sickness. Fumes in the lungs. Been in the hospital three weeks."

"They get careless," explains Latham; "we have a lot of cases like that. But you were well taken care of at the hospital, weren't you, my man?"

Kritt nods. "I wish I hadn't been," says he. "They turned me out—like this."

Forbes Latham shrugs his shoulders.

"You knew the risks when you went into the shop, didn't you?" he demands. "And you got your three dollars a day, double wages for unskilled labor. We can't do any more for you. Sorry. You'll be all right in a few days."

Kritt still stands there, blinkin' stupid. "Can't you get back to your folks?" says I.

"I—I wouldn't go to 'em—this way," says he. "I'd rather die."

"How about friends?" I suggests. "Where were you workin' before you went into this tolly shop?"

"Grocery, Asbury Park," says he.

"What!" says I. "Left a nice summer resort and a cinch job to go mixin' up bomb-stuffin'?"

"It was the three a day," says Kritt. "I needed that to—to— Well, there was Anna."

"Sure!" says I. "There generally is an Anna. Somebody's second girl, was she?"

"She was cashier in the grocery," says he. "I was sending most of my wages to her. When I'd saved up three hundred we was to have——"

"I get you," says I. "Took a cash reserve to ring the wedding bells for Anna. German, I'll bet?"

Kritt nods. "But—but I'm like this now," says he. "I can't get a job at anything."

"Oh, you'll find something," says Latham careless. "Here's a dollar."

Kritt stares at it and then shakes his head.

"If—if you could find me a place," says he, "until I get strong again. Maybe something outdoors."

"Why, say," I breaks in, "what's the matter with sendin' him up to that bloomin' cow farm of yours?"

Hit me as a happy little idea, but Latham don't warm up to it at all. He explains how he has only experts to look after his fancy stock, graduates of agricultural schools, and that a wreck like Kritt wouldn't fit in at all.

"Wouldn't, eh?" says I. "Then fit him in.

For, if you must know how I feel about it, this dumpin' your fact'ry waste on the street strikes me as kind of cold-blooded. I wouldn't treat a dog that way."

Latham squirms a bit at that, and flushes up some under the eyes. All of a sudden he shrugs his shoulders again and remarks casual: "Oh, well! Perhaps my farm superintendent can find something for him to do. I'll write him a note."

"Better make it an order," says I.

I sees to it, too, that Kritt has carfare and is started on his way.

For a few days Latham don't mention his farm again. But he can't keep off the subject for long. He begins once more urgin' me to go out with him.

"Maybe next week I will," says I.

As it happens, it wasn't until here the other day that I runs out of excuses and gets cornered. So after lunch Latham picks me up in a taxi, and by three o'clock we've made two changes and have been dropped 'way up somewhere among the nutmeg fields and pie orchards, where a black and white limousine is waitin' for us.

"Sporty color-scheme you got on the car," says I.

"It matches the Holsteins, you know," he explains.

I didn't quite get the point then. But by the time we'd rolled past about a mile of black-

and-white fence-pots and come in sight of a group of white buildin's with black trim I begun to suspect that Latham's collection was tinted different.

"My new barn on the left," says Forbes.

"Barn!" says I. "Quit kiddin'! You mean city hall."

It was a barn, though, but nothing like any I'd met before. Sort of a barn de luxe—cement floors, white cement walls, casement windows, steam heat, and a superintendent's office.

"We will go into the dormitory first," says Latham. "It's about milking time. Through here. There! How is that for a herd?"

Well, he got a gasp out of me. Here's a double row of black-and-white cows, fifty on a side, and all lookin' as neat and slick as if they'd just been gone over with shoe-blackin' and a powder-puff. They're in white iron pens, each with a white enameled feed-box and drinkin'-can, and the floor is as clean as a ball-room. And every cow has a door-plate with her name and number on it.

"Gosh!" says I, takin' off my hat. "I don't have to be introduced, do I?"

"It could be done," says Forbes. "They are all registered, and I have their certified pedigrees. The milking is going on, you see."

"Is it?" says I. "Where?"

All I could see was a couple of men in white duck suits movin' around quiet with covered pails. Then I spots this arrangement of tubes

that seems to be connected with the butter department of some of the cows.

"We use the electric milker, you know," says Latham. "Five units in operation."

I smothered the gasp that time.

Another thing that got me interested was the way they kept books on the cows. As soon as one is pumped dry the milk is weighed and the amount marked up on a chart opposite her name.

"Eighteen pounds for Mercedes II," I reads off, "and twenty-two this mornin'. That's producin' some, ain't it?"

"Lady Blanche has an average of forty-six pounds a day for a month," says Latham.

"Which is she?" I asks.

"Oh, she is in a private dormitory just now," says he, "on another test period. Sorry I can't take you in there, but during a test no one but her attendant sees her."

"Some exclusive cow, eh?" says I.

Next we went through the nurseries, where there are dozens of little black-and-white bossies of all sizes. I could have bought one of 'em too, one with four names and a pedigree a foot long, for two or three hundred dollars. Latham even offers to give me one if I'll start a dairy farm.

"Much obliged," says I; "but who am I, that's vague about my own grandfather, to associate with a calf like that? No, thanks, Latham."

Before we were through I had a peek at the outside of Lady Blanche's retreat quarters, and the superintendent showed us her test chart, where they'd put down every ounce of milk she'd given, all the details of her balanced ration, and I don't know but her pulse and temperature.

"But where's our friend Kritt?" I asks. "Got him busy on Lady Blanche's coachin' staff?"

Latham almost shudders.

"Certainly not," says he. "Only our most experienced and trustworthy men are allowed to come in direct contact with the herd. High-grade cows are sensitive animals, you know; and Kritt—I believe he is one of the floor-cleaning gang."

I suggests that I'd like to have a look at him, to see how he was comin' on, and the superintendent sends out a college hick in shell-rimmed glasses to have him paged. The report is that he can't be found.

"That's odd," says the superintendent, consultin' a work-book.

"Perhaps you can find him while I am taking Professor McCabe through the maternity wards," says Latham.

I didn't even blink at that. Honest, I wouldn't have been surprised at findin' a lot of trained nurses or a twilight sleep outfit. But while we're goin' from one buildin' to another, windin' through long hallways and

turnin' corners, I gets a glimpse of someone dodgin' behind a pile of boxes.

"Wasn't that Kritt?" says I.

"Not in here," says Latham. "He's not allowed."

"Looked like him, anyway," says I. "He made a sudden duck when he saw us."

"The deuce!" says Latham. "We'll just look into this. Here, was it behind these—Well, my man, what does this mean?"

It's Kritt, all right, crouchin' behind the boxes. He straightens up when he's discovered, and scowls at us sullen. He has improved a lot in a few weeks. His face hollows have filled out and he's got some color back. But he don't seem as tame as he did. There's an ugly look in his wide-set eyes, and he's keepin' one hand behind him. He don't seem anxious to talk.

"I say," insists Latham, "what are you doing here?"

Kritt only keeps on scowlin'.

"Come out of that," orders Latham. "You'll not, eh? Well, my man, I'll just——"

"Easy there!" I sings out. "He's got a knife."

Latham steps back hasty.

"Lemme handle him," says I. "Now, what's this all about, Kritt? What's the cutlery for, anyway?"

He stares sulky and grumbles something under his breath.

"Ah, come!" says I, talkin' soothin' and edgin' in on him gradual. "You know us, Kritt. We're friends of yours, ain't we?"

"You are, maybe," says Kritt, "but not him."

"Oh, well," says I, "tell it to me, then. Now, what's the idea of this——"

I made a quick grab at his wrist about then and shook that knife on to the floor. It's an eighteen-inch meat-carver.

"Sorry, Kritt," I goes on, "but you acted suspicious. Course, it was an accident, your havin' that knife, but——"

"It wasn't," snarls Kritt. "I was goin' to slit the throat of that blasted cow!"

"Which cow?" says I.

"Ah, that silly beast, Lady Blanche," says he.

Latham gasps.

"You scoundrel!" says he. "Kill Lady Blanche?"

Kritt chuckles hoarse.

"Har-r-r!" says he. "Gets under your hide, that does, don't it?"

"Why, Kritt!" says I. "What you got against the cow aristocracy?"

"That's just it!" says he. "Cow aristocrats! Honest to Gawd, McCabe, you'd think they was better'n human beings. Why, they're treated better. Do you know what? I was kicked out of the barn just for cussin' a bit before them lady cows. And this Blanche

beast! It would make you sick to hear these nuts talk about her—queen of the herd and all that.

"Say, she's got a box-stall better'n any room I ever had in my life—electric lights, a shower bath, and an electric fan to keep the air sweet. You ought to hear 'em fuss over her meals. And if she showed signs of bein' sick there'd be a doctor here on the jump. Think of that! That's the way he takes care of his cows. But the men that make his money for him— Say, you saw the way I looked. And I've seen over a hundred lugged out of the tolly shop with their pipes full of gas. What does he care? But his cows! You mustn't even speak cross to one. Bah! Say, I'll do it yet."

"You'll go to jail; that's where you'll go, my man," speaks up Latham.

"For what?" demands Kritt, sneerin'. "For attempted assault and battery on a cow?"

"Got a point on you there, Latham," says I.

"I'll find a way," says Forbes. "I think the village police justice will take care of this fellow for me."

"Not without a trial," says Kritt. "And I'll tell a few things that maybe won't look nice in print."

Latham bites his lip.

"Oh, come!" says I. "How is it goin' to help for you to go around committin' cow-macide? Mr. Latham didn't invent factories,

you know. There's plenty of other concerns just like his. And the bosses don't all run fancy dairies. You don't want to get sent up for malicious mischief, or anything like that. What would Anna say?"

"Huh! Anna!" he snorts. "She's quit me. Married another guy. On my money, too."

"Hard luck!" says I. "But you can't take it out on Mr. Latham's cows."

"I will," says Kritt. "Let him jail me if he dares."

"I dare," says Latham, "but I've just thought of something better. The army. You may take your choice."

"Fine!" says Kritt. "Lead me to the army."

Latham takes him at his word. Two minutes more and we've all moved into the office, where we're waitin' for the superintendent to get out his runabout and cart Mr. Kritt off to the nearest recruitin' station.

Just as the machine is ready, he steps up to shake hands with me. "So long, McCabe," says he. "You meant well by me, anyway. And I'm glad I came here and found out about these blasted cow aristocrats. It's set me to thinkin' things out. I've got it straight now, too. The army's the place for all trash like me. They'll learn us to shoot there. And say, some day we'll show these rotten plutes how well we can do it. It's the only way we'll ever get our rights."

Forbes Latham is near enough to hear some of this. As the car starts off that's takin' Kritt to be a soldier, he shakes his head and remarks:

"A dangerous fellow, Shorty—dangerous! Seems to have developed that streak recently."

"Maybe it's from associatin' with five-thousand-dollar cows," says I. "Got me a bit dizzy myself at first. Before we go, though, I wish you'd blow me to a dipperful of that machine-extracted milk. I could drink a hundred dollars' worth or so about now."

Which was makin' a quick shift, eh? But I didn't want to get in over my head. The Forbes Lathams—and the Kritts. There's so many of 'em, too! But unless you know the answer, which I don't, you just got to dig up something to grin about, ain't you?

CHAPTER XII

A FLICKETTY ONE LOOKS ON

I EXPECT I should have been stickin' around the Physical Culture Studio, seein' that Swifty Joe handled some of my Saturday reg'lars tender, and otherwise nursin' along the gate receipts. Instead of that, though, I let myself get rung in on this week-end stuff and help the aristocracy discover Mrs. Jim Trikett. They don't quite agree on Mrs. Jim, either.

"Perfectly delicious," is Mrs. Westerley Kipp's verdict.

"How can you, Mother!" sniffs Lady Dundee. "That utterly silly person!"

But then, that seems to be Lady Dundee's long suit, disagreein' with Mother. You know the kind, one of these peevish young queens with a cameo face and a tabasco disposition. Course, you got to make some allowance for all she's been through lately. For there was quite a spell, you know, when they wasn't quite sure whether Sir Freddie had really gone and got himself hopelessly mussed up with shrapnel or not.

Seems he hadn't signed on as Sir Frederick Dundee when he'd pulled his hero stunt of

slippin' off sudden and joinin' an ambulance corps, and the reports from the base hospital was kind of vague. The patient in cot 139 might have been him, or it might have been only his valet, whose name he'd pinched. You see, Pringle was missin', too. It turns out, though, to be Sir Freddie sure enough. Lady Dundee had been stunnin' in black for over a year now, and when mother had helped her close up Dundee House and brought her over here to recover from the shock and all, she'd been fairly swamped with sympathy.

It was one of Pinckney's batty ideas for an off-season trip up to that Berkshire Hills joint he's so bugs over. At first I tells him to count me out.

"May seem odd to you," says I, "but now and then I have to tend to business."

"My dear Shorty," says he, "if one can't neglect one's own business occasionally, whose business can one neglect? Besides, a day or so in the country is such a tonic."

"G'wan!" says I. "I can't work up any appetite standin' around watchin' you idle richers play quarter-a-point bridge all night. And, if I did, all I'd have to satisfy it would be them fancy dishes your French chef lugs up there with him. Country! Huh!"

"I am rebuked," says Pinckney; "and justly so. Yes, there is something in your subtle criticism. What is needed for an affair of this kind is the rural touch. I have it! We will

have a whole roast pig served for dinner. Eh, what?"

"That wins me," says I. "What train did you say?"

But his plan is for us to motor up in the limousine, lettin' the other guests go by rail. But it seems at the last minute Mrs. Westerley Kipp had accused him of being selfish, so he'd included her and Lady Dundee. We was makin' a nice, easy run of it too, barrin' a few snappy debates between mother and daughter, and we was rollin' along up through the pie orchards about as fast as eight cylinders could turn over, when we had to branch off the State road for a construction detour. We'd bumped over a mile or so of mighty uneven goin' before we hit this side-hill thank-you-ma'am that snapped two leaves of a front spring.

So it was a case of scoutin' for a 'phone. The chauffeur hikes one way while I goes the other, and that's what fetches me to this cute little hamlet where there's a tall iron smoke-stack and maybe a couple of dozen houses stragglin' along the main street. It was a loose-jointed youth pushin' past on a creaky bicycle who stopped long enough to say maybe I'd find a 'phone at Jim Trikett's.

"Fine!" says I. "But just who is Jim and which is his house?"

"Aw, Jim's th' engineer at th' shingle-mill," says the youth. "First place on yer left."

It's a nice, neat little near-bungalow, too;

all painted up fresh, with potted plants in the front windows, some different from the bare, weather-beaten shacks beyond and across the road. So I hammers on the door hopeful. I was about givin' it up when someone calls out from an upstairs window:

"Just a minute, please. I'll be right down."

Sort of a pipin', childish voice it was, and I was lookin' for some fifteen-year-old girl; but what finally opens the door is a female twice that age, I should say. Course, in a jay cross-roads like that I was expectin' someone to show up in an apron, maybe with traces of biscuit dough on her hands. But say, this party ain't costumed anything like that. She has little pink ribbon bows at her wrists and neck, net sleeves to her dress, pink satin slippers on her feet, and a spray of artificial rosebuds pinned into her hair on one side. A soft, fluttery-motioned, big-eyed, baby-faced female person, who glances at me sort of timid but curious.

"Mrs. Trickett?" I asks.

"Oh, yes," says she, starin' at me expectant.

Then I sketches out this broken spring disaster of ours, and asks can I ring up the nearest garage. I will say she was nice about it. Said she was so sorry, but all the 'phone connection they had was a private wire to the shingle-mill.

"One that Mr. Trikett rigged up himself," she explains, "for—for me."

Also she adds that the nearest reg'lar 'phone was at a farm-house half a mile back, or at the

store half a mile further on, and that there wasn't a garage for eight or ten miles in either direction.

"Looks like we're out of luck, then," says I. "I might as well go back and tell the ladies to settle down for a long wait."

"Ladies?" says Mrs. Trikett, perkin' up. "Now isn't that too bad! It will be dark soon, and it's quite chilly out. Now wouldn't they like— I—I'd love to have you all come up here and wait."

"Why, that's decent of you, Mrs. Trikett," says I. "I'll tell 'em what you say."

I finds that the chauffeur has worked the farm-house 'phone and has a wreckin' car on the way, but that there's a two-hour hang-up ahead of us. Mrs. Westerley Kipp hails the invite enthusiastic, so of course daughter has to knock it.

"Go into one of these wretched houses! Ugh!" says Lady Dundee.

"A very interesting display of delicate sensibilities," comments mother, "particularly from a young woman who was born in Calumet, Michigan. Professor McCabe, you say the place looked clean?"

"Neat as a new bath-tub," says I. "And Mrs. Trikett seemed real anxious to have you come."

"Then I'm going to risk it," says she, "and if Eleanor chooses to mope here by the roadside, she may."

Eleanor didn't, though. She sputtered about not knowin' what horrid disease one might catch, but she trotted right along with the rest of us. I'd merely told 'em how this was where the shingle-mill engineer lived, without tryin' to describe Mrs. Jim. I kind of wanted to spring her on 'em.

Well, I did. I sprung a heap more'n I'd planned. She must have been watchin' from the window, for she has the front door open as soon as we strikes the steps; and, with some birch logs blazin' away in the fireplace and a couple of lamps lighted, the livin'-room does look sort of cheerful. But that ain't all the surprise she hands out. Mother has hardly stepped inside before Mrs. Jim Trikett sort of gasps out:

"Why—why, it's Mrs. Westerley Kipp, isn't it?"

Mrs. Kipp rolls her eyes at me accusin' and admits that it is.

"Then," says Mrs. Jim, turnin' to daughter, "you—you must be Lady Dundee, I suppose?"

"Naturally," snaps daughter. "I didn't know that Mr. McCabe was going to announce us."

"Honest, I didn't," says I. "How did you guess, Mrs. Trikett?"

"I didn't," says she. "I knew. And I'm sure this is Mr. Pinckney Ogden Bruce, too."

"It's so nice of you to remember," says

Pinckney, "and quite stupid of me not to recall where we—that is——"

"Oh, no, it isn't," laughs Mrs. Trikett. "You couldn't be stupid if you tried. And now, if you will make yourselves comfortable, I'll see if we can't have some tea. You'll excuse me, won't you?"

Mrs. Kipp and Pinckney both protest that she mustn't bother; but away she flutters towards the back of the house, leavin' us to make ourselves to home. Course, the first thing they does is to pitch into me for sayin' I hadn't told who was in the party, and it was while I'm right in the midst of registerin' my alibi that Lady Dundee makes this discovery.

"My word!" says she. "No wonder the woman knew us, Mother. Look!"

We hadn't noticed the walls before, which was a little odd, seein' the startlin' way they was decorated. From the chair rail to the ceilin' there wasn't a vacant space. And all pictures of people, framed with strips of gilt cardboard.

Mrs. Westerley Kipp leaves the fire and walks over, adjustin' her lorgnette.

"As I live!" says she. "In our court gowns, too! From *À la Mode,* June, 1910. And I remember the photographer assuring me confidentially that I looked truly regal. I can repeat what it says underneath without reading: 'The noted American social leader and her beautiful daughter, who recently became the

bride of Sir Frederick Dundee.' Come here, Pinckney, and tell me I don't look a day older."

"By Jove!" says he, takin' a glance. "That photographer chap wasn't spoofing, you know. Regal's the word. But how do you suppose this Mrs. Trikett happened to——"

"Hey!" I breaks in. "You've made the grade yourself. How about this of you at Piping Rock, watchin' the polo game?"

"Really?" says Pinckney. "Where? Well, well! Come, Mrs. Kipp. Your turn. Was I not majestic in that style of top-coat? Ah, me! That was the season I was having such a desperate affair with that stunning blond from Richmond. Yes, there she is in the background with Ollie Blair. Poor Ollie! He got her, you know, and now——"

"Please," puts in Lady Dundee, "mayn't we look at some of the others? Here's mother again, at Newport this time. Truly, did you ever wear a hat like that, Mother? And here is Mrs. Stuyve Burgess in all the glory of her pearl ropes. The Countess Zitka, too! What a mixed lot!"

"But all persons of some social importance, you will kindly note," adds Pinckney. "I wonder if our hostess can have——"

"Sh-h-h-h!" warns Mrs. Kipp as Mrs. Jim Trikett comes floatin' in.

"Ah!" says Mrs. Jim, laughin' nervous. "Now you can guess how I recognized you.

I suppose you know many of them very well, do you?"

"Oh, yes," admits Mrs. Kipp.

"Just think!" says Mrs. Trikett, drawin' a long breath. "That—that must be wonderful."

It's the real gaspy stuff. She stands there starin' at Mrs. Westerley Kipp, them big baby eyes of hers opened up like pansies and her slim, ring-covered fingers gripped together tight. Then all of a sudden she comes to.

"Oh," says she. "I'm forgetting. I must ring for tea."

She don't get it off easy and natural, but more like she was rehearsin' lines for a play. And as she takes a little silver bell off the mantel she kind of hesitates, as if she was workin' up courage. At the first tinkle, though, a door opens and in comes a butler pushin' a tea-wagon.

Then the gasp act is up to us. You don't look for such things in little cross-roads bungalows, you know. But here's a perfectly good tea outfit, with dainty china cups, dinky hemstitched napkins, and a tray full of cross-cut sandwiches. There's even sliced lemon and a squatty little cut-glass rum jug. What if the butler's Tuxedo was a little tight across the shoulders and a trifle short in the sleeves. There he was, throwin' his whole soul into the job, with one eye on the sandwich tray and the other on Mrs. Trikett, watchin' for signals.

She's some flustered herself about just how to do it, and springs that panicky little giggle every time she speaks; but she don't make any bad breaks that I can see. She has the regulation line of social chat, askin' Mrs. Kipp and Pinckney about their friends: where the Norcross Paynes were this season; was it true that Leonora Blair had really tried to enlist as a French aviator; and did they think the ice-skating craze would last through the winter?

All the time, though, she's watchin' the butler close, and when everyone has been helped she gives him the nod, remarkin' crisp: "That will do, James."

He's hardly faded through the door before Mrs. Kipp opens the cross-examination.

"Now, my dear," says she, "tell us all about it."

"Why," says Mrs. Trikett, glancin' around scarey, "about—about what?"

"First," says Mrs. Kipp, "about this remarkable collection of pictures. Have you ever known any of these persons?"

"Not—not really," says Mrs. Jim. "I—I've read about them, though. Such a lot about you, for instance."

"H-m-m-m!" says Mrs. Kipp, eyin' her close. "What a sad waste of time! So much of it wasn't so. But you must subscribe for all the smart magazines, the English ones as well?"

"Yes," says Mrs. Trikett. "One must to keep up. They cost such a lot, too."

"And you've been doing it for years."

Mrs. Jim nods. "Ever since I was married," says she.

"Why?" demands Mrs. Kipp.

Little Mrs. Trikett looks around the circle of curious eyes, then shrugs her shoulders sort of helpless.

"Oh, you wouldn't understand," says she. "You couldn't. You don't know what it is to be a nobody, hopelessly unknown—living nowhere, going nowhere, seeing no one, nor being seen. Why, I was born within five miles of Kelly's Mills; so was Jim—er—Mr. Trikett. And we've hardly been away from here all our lives. He hasn't seemed to mind; he's real sensible. But I—I'm flicketty, I guess."

"Pardon me," puts in Mrs. Kipp. "You're what?"

"Flicketty," says Mrs. Jim. "You know, that's what the boys and girls at the Academy used to call me—Flicketty Flora. They said I read too many novels and put on airs. Perhaps I did. But I wanted to be different. Of course, I didn't know how, except from what I'd read. But I'd made up my mind that some day I would be like—like—well, like one of those women Mrs. Humphry Ward puts in her books. That was silly, wasn't it?"

"No sillier than for Mrs. Humphry Ward to write about 'em," says Mrs. Kipp. "She

knows that no such persons ever existed: you don't. But let's have the rest. You couldn't be an English governess and marry a young lord or elope with a prime minister; so you took Mr. Trikett. Engineer at the shingle-mill, isn't he?"

"Yes," Mrs. Jim admits, kind of sobby. "It was either that or go on teaching in the district school. And I hated teaching. Oh, how I did hate it! I didn't care so much for Jim, either. I told him I never could. But he's been awful good to me. He has humored all my flicketty notions. Do you know, he even made me promise never to give up hoping."

"Hoping for what?" asks Mrs. Kipp.

"That sometime I might be—be somebody," says Mrs. Trikett. "Anyway, for a little while, perhaps no more than a day, just to see what it was like. So we—we have gone on making believe that it would happen, and getting ready. This is part of it—the pictures. 'You'll want to know who's who and all that,' Jim said.

"So I began cutting these out of the society magazines and putting them on the walls where I could see them every day. Then I read the social notes about you and—and all the others. Having the pictures helped. And from the novels I got ideas about what you did and how you talked and what you had to eat and so on. That's where I learned about serving tea. Tell me, Mrs. Kipp, did—did I do it so very badly?"

"My dear," says Mrs. Kipp, "you did it perfectly. What I can't understand, though, is how, out here in the country, you can find such a well trained butler."

"Oh!" says Mrs. Trikett, flushin' up pleased. "Did he do well? I am so glad. And he—well, I think he'll be glad, too. He—he's just Jim, you know."

"Wha-a-at!" gasps Mrs. Kipp. "Your—your——"

Mrs. Trikett nods.

"I didn't mean to tell that part," says she. "But you've made me so happy and so proud. You see, we have practiced it a lot, all by ourselves; so I should know how to act, you know, if I should ever be where there was a real butler. And then, when you were stranded down the road there, and I found that you might come up here,—some real ladies and gentlemen,—I 'phoned for Jim to hurry home from the mill. We had a hard time getting him into his suit,—it's one he bought second-hand in Hartford and never was quite big enough for him,—but he got all fixed up and was helping me with the sandwiches when you came. Won't he be surprised, though, when I tell him that the folks he waited on were—well, the real thing."

"You delightfully absurd person!" says Mrs. Westerley Kipp. "Do you know what I wish I might do? I'd like to make the whole of that

utterly foolish dream of yours come true—to let you be a real somebody just for a few days."

With that she shoots a knowin' look over at Pinckney. And say, you don't have to jab him in the ribs for Pinckney to get a hint. He's a sport, too.

"Why not do it, then?" says he. "There's an extra seat in the car."

I thought for a minute that Mrs. Kipp was goin' to give him the fond clinch, right before everybody. All she does, though, is to put a hand on either shoulder and look him straight in the eye.

"Pinckney darlint," says she, droppin' into the brogue she can do so well, "do ye mane it? Oh, the grand big heart of ye! Mrs. Trikett, Mr. Bruce presents his compliments and begs you to spend the week-end with us at Hickory Top. Get your bag ready."

Mrs. Trikett, she just gazes from one to the other of 'em like she don't know whether they're joshin' her or not. But they finally convinces her that the invite is straight goods.

"Why," says she, sort of dazed, "I—I'd love to do it, of course. It—it's what I've longed for. But—but there's Jim. I don't know whether Jim would like it or not."

"Shorty," says Pinckney, "can't you find Jim and discover?"

"I can make a stab," says I. "Kitchen's out this way, ain't it? Just a minute."

He looks mighty foolish, too, when I catch him in his shirt sleeves, stirrin' up some scrambled eggs for his supper.

"Hello!" says I. "You can double as cook, can you? But say, that was a perfectly good butling act you put over, take it from me."

He gawps at me for a minute without sayin' a word. And, come to look at him close, he is sort of a rugged, hand-hewed party, specially about the face. Yet somehow there's a soft touch around the mouth corners, and the wide-set eyes are kind of gentle and mild. You could guess they hadn't always been that way —that something had mellowed him down a lot.

"Flora told, did she?" says he, as if he was a bit disappointed.

"She didn't mean to," says I. "It came out. No harm done. And the folks in there want to take her along for a little visit with them. How about it?"

"What folks? Who are they?" demands Jim.

"Then you ain't studied the wall pictures as close as Mrs. Trikett," says I. "She knew 'em right off the reel. Spotted Mrs. Westerley Kipp first, and then Lady Dundee."

"Honest?" says Jim, droppin' the egg fork in the pan. "Are—are they there?"

"Uh-huh," says I. "And up at Hickory Top will be the Twombley-Cranes, Reggie van Cort, Mrs. Jack Lardner; in fact, the pick of your gallery. And Mrs. Kipp wants Mrs. Trikett to come too."

Jim studies that over for a minute; then all of a sudden his eyelids narrow suspicious and his big fists get bunchy.

"See here," he growls hoarse; "you—you're not doing this to—to make fun of her, are you?"

"Mrs. Westerley Kipp ain't that kind," says I. "Why, she started in a little Michigan minin' town herself, and if she hadn't happened to marry a copper king in the bud she'd been there yet. No, Jim; it's just because she understands what Mrs. Trikett wants. I'm givin' you my word for that. And, say, she'd like to go mighty bad."

"Then she shall," says Jim.

It was him packed her bag, too, and helped her on with her wraps when the limousine drives up. He'd followed her out to the front steps, and was standin' there lookin' dumb and longin' after the excited, fluttery little woman that was bein' sort of kidnapped, you might say, by a lot of strangers. And just then she glances back. Next thing we knew, she was rushin' towards him.

"Oh, Jim!" says she, grabbin' him around the neck, "I—I do love you, Jim. But—but I want to go so much."

"I know, Flo," says he, chokin' up some and pattin' her on the shoulder. "You're goin', too; that's all there is about it. Don't mind me. I'll get along all right. Now run on and —and have a good time."

Did she? Say, I wish you could have seen her at dinner that first night, after Mrs. Kipp and Sadie has fixed her up in one of Lady Dundee's evenin' gowns. Them pansy eyes of hers just beamed for joy every minute. She didn't say much. She took it out in watchin' and listenin', and I'll bet there wasn't a detail, from the gold service plates to the wax taper Lady Dundee lit her cigarette from, that she lost. And she was like that all the time until we dropped her again at Kelly's Mills on our way back.

When she got through huggin' Mrs. Kipp, she thanked us all, includin' me and the chauffeur.

"I don't care now," says she. "What if I do have to live the rest of my life at the Mills? I've had what I wanted. And besides—well, I've learned to love Jim."

"Then you've learned the best lesson in the world, my dear," says Mrs. Westerley Kipp. "Good-by."

"Oh, well," I says to Pinckney, "sometimes these women hand each other the truth, don't they?"

"Do they?" says Pinckney. "Or is it that they indulge in emotional lapses?"

Not quite followin' his remark, I just let it ride. Maybe it was deep stuff. More likely, though, it was something he thought sounded clever.

CHAPTER XIII

CHECKING UP ON LARSEN

It just goes to show that you can't lump 'em. People, I mean. Now, take taxi-drivers. I can't say why, but I never could see one without glancin' at his hair and wonderin' how long since he got out of the pen. That is, I never could until I got to know Virgil.

It was one forenoon a spell ago, when things was a little slack at the Physical Culture Studio and I was sittin' here at the roll-top with my heels up, when in blows this gooseb'ry-eyed party in the cap and leggins.

He sizes me up careful for a minute and then asks: "Professor McCabe's place, isn't it?"

"If you mistrust the sign on the door," says I, "I'll relieve your mind. It is. What then?"

I thought I saw his upper lip twitch sort of resentful, but outside of that his face never changes. He takes time to let my remarks sink in, and then announces solemn: "Mr. Mayo is downstairs."

"Is he?" says I. "Why don't he come up, then? He's due."

The party in the leggins shuffles his feet a bit and stares at the ceilin'.

"He—he's in the car," says he. "I don't think he knows he's here."

"Oh!" says I. "It's that way, is it?"

I expect I gave a chuckle, too. For the humorous jag is Robert Cutting Mayo's specialty. Ask anyone in the lobster-palace zone about Bobbie Brut, and see if they don't grin. Ten to one, too, they'll proceed to tell you some of his most comic doin's, and how many quarts of inspiration he had to go on.

Yes, he's a reg'lar of mine. Not that I got many like him, or play the Studio for any alcoholic ward. But, somehow, Bobbie Brut belongs—friend of Pinckney's and all that.

"Clean spiffed, is he?" I asks.

What does this here chauffeur gent do but stiffen up kind of haughty.

"If you mean to ask is Mr. Mayo intoxicated," says he, "I don't believe I care to say."

He had me gaspin' a bit there.

"Oh, you don't, eh?" says I. "Well, well! Say, who the blazes are you, anyway?"

"I'm Mr. Mayo's chauffeur," says he.

"Think of that!" says I. "And here I had you sized up as his private secretary. Kind of a chauffeur de luxe, I expect. What does Mr. Mayo call you when he hails you by name?"

"Mostly he calls me Sport or old Glue Face," says he, growlin' it out sort of sulky; "but my right name is Larsen—Virgil Larsen."

"Very pretty, too," says I. "Where'd he pick you from, Virgil?"

"I was driving a taxi," says he.

"What line?" says I.

"Independent," says Virgil.

"Oh, a pirate?" I goes on. "Where was your stand?"

"Times Square," says he.

"Huh!" says I. "Then you must have done a lot of joy cruisin' in your time."

He nods stiff, without enthusiasm.

"I've only been in the city about a year," says he.

Somehow he'd got me curious, so I goes on with the pumpin' process.

"Where do you hail from, then?" says I.

"Twig, Minnesota," says he.

"Good comedy," says I, "but what's the joke?"

He insists, though, that Twig is the name of a place. Seems he'd been brought up on a farm.

"It was too lonesome," says Virgil, "so I came away."

"Couldn't you find any Olga to hook up with?" I asks.

He pinks up and shakes his head.

"I didn't try," says he. "With women around you can't improve your mind."

Now, I leave it to you, wouldn't talk like that from an ex-taxi-driver get you dizzy? It does me.

"What do you mean, now—improve your mind?" says I.

"I want to know things," says Virgil, "all kinds of things—like the boss mechanic in the garage where I worked at St. Paul. He could tell you 'most anything you wanted to know—like how far it is to the moon, how many angleworms a robin eats in a day, the population of China. He read books and magazines all the time. That's the way you get to be somebody."

"Maybe you'll work up to be some kind of professor, eh?" I suggests. "Where do you do most of your readin', in the machine?"

"Some there," says he, "but more at the Y. M. C. A., where I have a room. They have all the scientific magazines there."

"Say," says I, "with them tastes you must have a hot time drivin' for Bobbie Brut."

Virgil blinks them gooseb'ry eyes of his once or twice and remarks careless:

"I'm not responsible for what Mr. Mayo does with his time, so long as I make the most of my own."

"I see," says I. "But there's just one thing I ain't quite clear on, Virgil. If Mr. Mayo's in the state you don't care to mention, what was your grand little idea in cartin' him here?"

"His orders are," says Larsen, "not to let him forget Tuesdays and Fridays at ten-thirty. And this is Friday, isn't it?"

"How cute of you!" says I. "That's what comes of readin' up so much, I expect. It's a wonder, though, you could pry him loose from the feathers."

"If you mean get him out of bed," says Virgil, "I didn't need to. He hasn't been in it."

"What!" says I. "Been out all night, has he? Since when?"

"We started for dinner about seven-thirty night before last," says Virgil.

"Some party!" says I. "Where you been meanderin' for thirty-six hours or so?"

"Many places," says Virgil. "Clover Blossom Inn, the White Horse, Costigan's. The last was 'way up beyond White Plains: Maison —Maison——"

"Maison Rouge," says I. "And, after all that, you bring him here!"

"I didn't think Mr. Mayo would want to go to his club in evening clothes at this time of day," says he.

"Something in that, too," says I; "and, while I ain't strong for inspectin' hangovers, maybe I'd better take a look at Bobbie."

Inside of half an hour, what with the rubbin' down he got from Swifty Joe and the black coffee I've sent out for, young Mr. Mayo is almost back to normal—that is, barrin' the squirrel chase still goin' on in his loft. He sits there in the gym, costumed mainly in wrinkled dress trousers and a puzzled look, holdin' his chin in his hands.

One of these beefy, short-necked, heavy-jawed young gents, Bobbie is, with a merry set of blue eyes and a hair-trigger smile that's

about as winnin' as they bloom. He looks up at me and springs it now.

"Am I coming or going, Shorty?" says he.

"Check!" says I. "For a guess, though, I should say you'd been."

"But just why am I here?" he insists.

"Brilliant thought of Virgil's," says I.

"Ah!" says Bobbie, seemin' to discover his chauffeur for the first time. "Due to the noble Larsen, eh? Then it must be right. For Larsen, Shorty, never miscues. Do you, now, old Glue Face?"

"If I couldn't trust my memory with simple orders," says Virgil, "what would be the use of loading it with improving facts?"

"Hear that, Shorty?" says Mayo. "But he's too modest. Most wonderful mind in captivity. Tell him now, Larsen, how many tons of iron ore are shipped annually from Duluth."

"Forty millions," says Virgil prompt.

"And that about the number of people who cross the East River every day," goes on Bobbie Brut.

"Taking the daily average," says Larsen, "in a single year they would more than equal the entire population of Europe."

"There!" says Bobbie. "That's what you achieve by living at the Y. M. C. A. and reading popular science stuff. Reads it all the time; don't you, Larsen?"

"I try to improve my mind," says Virgil.

"So you do," says Mayo. "Now let's have the effects of alcohol on the human system."

"It hardens the membranous tissues, reduces the disease resisting qualities of the red corpuscles, and numbs the delicate nervous system controlling all muscular action," repeats Virgil, like he was readin' it out of a book.

"Huh!" says I. "Pity you didn't turn on that record before you started out night before last."

"Wha-a-at!" gasps Bobbie. "You don't mean to say that this is day after to-morrow?"

"It's Friday on the calendar," says I, "so your party must have begun about Wednesday night."

"Oh, I say!" he groans. "How—where—Look here, Larsen, what the deuce became of Ferdy? You know, the tall, serious-faced chap with the eye-glasses?"

"Him? Let's see," says Virgil, beginnin' to count off on his fingers. "He came out of the White Horse with you, and Costigan's, but when you left that Maison place—no, he wasn't along; only the Russian dancers."

"Eh?" says Bobbie, starin' at him. "What Russian dancers? I know none."

"You introduced them to me," says Virgil, "although I don't care to meet that kind of people, and said so at the time. Then one of the ladies wanted to ride standing up on the hood, you know. I helped you put her in the

limousine. We dropped them at their hotel early this morning."

"Perhaps we did," says Bobbie. "It doesn't matter. But Ferdy! Say, Shorty, this is awful. Call up the Maison Rouge, won't you, and see if he's still there?"

"Any special Ferdy you had in mind?" says I.

"Why, Ferdy de Witt," says he.

"Oh!" says I. "The one who's goin' to marry that Bishop's daughter?"

"It's to be to-night," says Bobbie. "That —that's what I was giving the dinner for, you see. But do call up the Maison Rouge, Shorty."

So I gets busy with the long distance, and after havin' the road-house people make a thorough canvass of their leftovers they report that there ain't anybody of Ferdy's description around the place. Next I gets his man on the wire at his rooms; but he says Ferdy ain't been seen there since Wednesday night, and his new dress clothes all laid out and everything.

"Looks like you'd mislaid a bridegroom," says I.

Bobbie Brut groans.

"I've got to find him, then," says he. "You see, Ferdy didn't want to go at all—wanted to rush right home after the dinner; and I wouldn't let him. I remember that much. Rather a quiet stick, Ferdy; but, this being

his last free night, I thought he ought to—well, see a few of the bright spots. Everyone goes to the White Horse, and Costigan's. I hadn't quite planned on the Maison Rouge. I wonder how we happened to get there? And those Russian dancers!" Bobbie shrugs his shoulders. Then he adds: "I say! They might know what became of Ferdy."

"It's a chance," says I.

He couldn't follow up the clue, though, until Virgil had been sent for some daylight clothes. While he waits he puts in his time, first stewin' about Ferdy, and then switchin' to Larsen, tellin' me what a wonder he was.

"Yes, I know," says I, "Virgil's been admittin' some of that stuff to me himself. Can he drive a car, though?"

"Like a fiend," says Bobbie. "But only when I give him the word. You see, he has such steady nerves—doesn't drink or smoke or anything like that. And his being such an abstainer, and so religious—well, it sort of strikes a balance between us, doesn't it? It evens things up. Besides, helping him fill his brain with improving facts is almost an occupation in itself. You should hear the questions he asks me! What is asphalt paving? Are my shirt-studs real pearl and where do they come from? If people who have been divorced meet again, say at a party, would they speak? Things like that.

When Larsen comes back with the kit-bag he announces offhand:

"Lot of telegrams for you at your club, Mr. Mayo. And the exchange operator says you've been called by 'phone every half-hour since——"

"Yes, yes, I suppose so," breaks in Bobbie. "The Bishop, probably, and Ferdy's folks. Didn't tell anyone where I was, did you, Larsen?"

Virgil shakes his head. He don't put any frills into his chauffin'; no salutes or "sir" stuff. And instead of chasin' back to his car he stands there watchin' Bobbie dress with sort of a half-stupid, half-interested look on his dull face. I couldn't help wonderin' what was goin' on behind them gooseb'ry eyes. In a minute more I had a clue.

"What if a man who was going to be married shouldn't get there on time?" asks Virgil.

"Eh?" says Mr. Mayo, strugglin' with a stiff buttonhole. "Why, in this particular case the deuce would be to pay. It would be all off with Ferdy."

"Oh!" says Virgil; and just a suspicion of a smile flickers around his mouth corners. Then he turns wooden again.

"But Ferdy's got to be found," says Bobbie Brut, throwin' the rest of his clothes on energetic. "Come along, Shorty, and join the hunt. We'll try those Russian dancers first."

"G'wan!" says I. "I can't talk Russian."

"No more can they, I suspect," says Bobbie. "But if ever I needed advice and counsel it's now. And my head's none too clear. Please."

So I has to trail along while Virgil drives us to an upper Broadway hotel.

"Let's see," says Bobbie, as we rolls up to the entrance; "what are their names, Larsen?"

Virgil hangs his head.

"I—I forget," says he.

"What?" says Bobbie. "With that sure-fire memory of yours? Nonsense!"

"You didn't say them very plain," protests Virgil.

"Perhaps I didn't," admits Bobbie. "But you surely remember what they looked like. Come in and describe them to the clerk for me."

Virgil makes no move to leave the wheel, though.

"It—it was kind of dark," says he. "I don't think I'd know them again."

"Rot!" says Bobbie. "You've got to go. Come along."

"No," says Virgil, settin' his chin stubborn.

"Oh, I say!" groans Bobbie. "Shorty, you talk to him."

Which I proceeds to do.

"What's the idea?" says I. "Why the mulish streak all so sudden?"

"I'm not going to help find Ferdy, that's all," says he. "He's a decent young fellow,

and he wouldn't have been in this condition if it hadn't been for—for——"

"Well, for what?" I demands.

"For this silly wedding," he growls sullen.

"Oh, ho!" says I. "Now we're gettin' some light. Maybe you had something to do with his disappearin'? Come, did you?"

Virgil, he just stares woodenly into the windshield.

"Some chauffeur you've got there, Mayo," says I. "Does reformin' and woman-hatin' on the side."

"Larsen," says Bobbie Brut, as stern as he knows how, "do I understand that you have Ferdy hidden somewhere?"

"What if I have?" growls Virgil.

"Oh, nothing much," says I. "It's only a case of kidnappin'. You won't get more'n ten or fifteen years for it."

"In—in jail?" he asks husky.

"Sing Sing," says I. "You'll be a great addition to the Welfare League."

"I—I don't want to go to jail," whimpers Virgil.

"Then roll us to where you've got Ferdy in cold storage," says I, "and mighty quick."

"Ye-e-es, sir," says he draggy.

Where do you think he took us? To his Y. M. C. A. branch, where he has a room. On the way down he explains how he'd sent Ferdy back with a taxi-driver friend who was leavin' the Maison Rouge light.

"And he's probably in there now, sleeping his head off," says Bobbie Brut, "with his wedding at seven-thirty this evening! Think of that!"

I follows him in his dash up the steps, and gets to the desk just as he's interviewin' the young gent in charge.

"The gentleman in forty-seven?" says the clerk. "The one in evening clothes? Why, he left about ten minutes ago in a cab. He seemed to be in a great hurry."

"He was," says Bobbie. "Much obliged."

"Anyway," says I, "Ferdy's been provided with a first-class alibi to submit at the Bishop's."

"What?" asks Bobbie.

"Overslept at the Y. M. C. A., didn't he?" says I.

"By George!" says Bobbie. "I must 'phone him to use that. And if it hadn't been for Larsen's taking him there—well, I don't know what he could have said."

"The noble Larsen!" says I. "Mean to say he don't get his release for this fool play?"

"He gets his salary raised," says Bobbie. "And if I can keep him long enough, Shorty, I'll bet you ten to one that I shall begin to show signs of mental development and moral uplift myself. I feel it setting in."

"If he works any reform on you," says I, "I shall know that the open season for miracles is on."

As he drops me at the Studio I indulges in a final bit of repartee with Virgil.

"Goin' to keep right on improvin' that mind of yours, are you?" I asks.

"Yes," says he.

"Look out, Virgil," says I. "Next thing you know, you'll be a highbrow."

"What's that?" says he.

"A party that's educated beyond his intellect," says I. "But go to it. You got as much right to overstuff your nut as the next one, I guess."

Say, though, I'm through tryin' to lump chauffeurs as all one class. Virgil cured me of that. He had me buffaloed there for a while, too. I couldn't dope him out. But I got it now. His trouble is an overgrown ego complicated with bone in the head. At that, I don't know but he's a good runnin' mate for Bobbie Brut.

CHAPTER XIV

AN EVEN BREAK WITH BRADLEY

Come to think it over, instead of grouchin' around the way I did, I should have lured my disposition into some vacant lot, rushed it over the rocks until I had a strangle-hold on it, and got a decision then and there. But I didn't. The fact is, I kept on lettin' this young cub get on my nerves until—well, if ever I ached to tease a certain party up in front of me with the six-ounce gloves on, it was this same Bradley Ward.

And for that I should have taken shame of myself, as Father Riordan used to say. But maybe you know how some kinds of people just rub you the wrong way in spite of all you can do.

Now I can stand for a lot of stuff that seems to set other folks' teeth on edge—bores of different kinds, windy gas-bags, braggers, bromides, dyspeptic rag-chewers that find everything goin' wrong and insist on givin' you the details. Generally I can listen until I can make a cheerful getaway, or if I'm cornered I can grin and kid 'em along.

But this young Bradley Ward! Say, I expect I might as well own up how it was he

first got me pawin' my front hoofs. It was an offhand little remark he let drop 'way last summer, which might have been meant for me to pick up or might not. Anyway, it registered, and from then on it stuck in my mind about as pleasant as a sliver under your finger-nail.

The worst of it was, it ain't anything I could take up with him, or even beef about to my best friends. 'Most gets me pink in the ears just tryin' to state it.

One night down at the Yacht and Country Club it was, when we was pullin' off a big costume ball we'd arranged for the young folks. I say "we" because I happened to be one of the unlucky parties that had most of the work wished onto 'em. You know how them things go in suburban clubs. And with a new steward to break in, and our fire insurance suspended on account of a lot of temporary electric wirin', and the orchestra threatenin' to quit at eleven unless we could guarantee to get 'em back to town that night—well, some of us had to stay on the job. Which we was doin', and lookin' as pleasant as possible over it.

Then to have this young shrimp of a Bradley Ward stretch himself out on the cushions in the smokin'-room and shoot off a remark like that between puffs of a cigarette!

"Come on, Brad," one of his chums calls in to him. "The girls want you to start up the big circle stuff—a Paul Jones, you know—and put some pep into things."

"Aw, wait until a few more of those old cocks go home, Ferdy," says Bradley.

And then, glancin' up and seein' me standin' in the doorway, he winks knowin' at Ferdy and hunches his shoulders careless.

That's it! Give me the grin. I knew you would. It's a comedy cue nobody ever misses —when it's on the other fellow. But say, here was once when I couldn't see the humor of it.

Accordin' to Bradley, I was listed as one of the old cocks, eh? Old? That's what got under my skin. Course, I don't try to pass for any young hick. And I'll admit that in sport circles I've been in the veteran class for quite some seasons. All you got to do to find out how many years it's been since I gave up the lightweight championship is to turn to any newspaper almanac. But ring ages are different. Bradley wasn't referrin' to that: he was talkin' about old cocks who was in the way.

Yes, I'll even admit that Master Sullivan McCabe is goin' on ten, and that there's little sister, too. I don't deny, either, that I'm wearin' my brow a trifle higher'n I did once. But does that put me among the antiques, give me an old-codger ratin', or set me back with the gouty-kneed relics who simply clutter up the path of the comin' generation?

Honest, I had to go out on the veranda and chin myself eight or ten times before I could shake off the feelin' that my next move would be towards the scrap-heap.

Old! I expect it's comin' to the best of us some time or other. I've often wondered how people felt when they saw the frost creepin' into their hair—how I'd feel. I never laid any plans for side-steppin' it, either, when my day came. But to have it chucked at me when I can still claim to be in the thirties! Say, that was gettin' a jab before I'd even thought of puttin' up my guard.

There's a sayin', ain't there, about guys who hand you unpleasant news? They're in wrong with you from that date. Well, that's just how I felt towards this young Bradley. Nothin' he did looked right to me, and the more I studied his ways the less comfort I took in havin' him round. Course, that bothered him about as much as floods in China or spots on the sun.

For Bradley was one of these young gents who carry their chins high and don't fritter away any of their moral fiber dislikin' themselves. While he didn't always seem quite satisfied with things in general there was no doubt about his bein' contented with himself. Acted a good deal, Bradley did, as if the world had been built special for him to play around in, and he suspicioned he could have improved a lot on the job if he'd arrived earlier.

Maybe I'm overstatin' the case, but he had that air. Just by the way he walked through a room, lettin' his heels fall heavy, he could give you the idea. Even up at my house, where he hung around more or less with a certain bunch

of young people that Sadie was popular with, right on my own veranda, Bradley could somehow make me feel that it would be much better taste if I'd go out and sit in the garage.

Understand, I don't kid myself that he had it in for me specially. It was simply that he didn't have any use for anybody over twenty, or twenty-two at most. Beyond that they was dead ones to Bradley. They didn't count. Oh, he was willin' to borrow their tourin' cars or run their motor-boats or use their houses, or let 'em feed him sandwiches and ice cream and cake at certain times.

But as for givin' 'em the civil hail when he passed or puttin' up with their comp'ny for more'n two minutes at a stretch, Bradley couldn't do it. When he got cornered with grown people, he simply turned sulky and sullen, givin' an exhibition of sawmill manners that would have had a blanket Indian lookin' like John Drew.

Course he kept his rawest bits for mother. Let her come purrin' around, pattin' him tender on the arm, or tryin' to smooth his hair, or anything like that, and Bradley would show you in one cold glance how deep a contempt one human being can have for another.

"Aw, have a heart, Ma!" was his favorite greetin', and then he'd turn his back on her.

And yet, in his way, Bradley had good points. He was just as ornamental as any of these young collar-ad. Adonises. You might have

thought he'd been used as a model. He was enough of a tennis crack to walk off with the club championship in the singles. He could shoot the Agawampum golf course in the seventies, I heard. And he was bein' congratulated that summer that he'd been picked as substitute quarter-back on his 'varsity eleven. Also he could lead his bunch through a long program of barber-shop chords and musical comedy hits with a tenor that wasn't half bad.

Likewise, when it came to rushin' the girls—well, Bradley had Nat Goodwin lookin' like a cross-eyed monk doin' penance. When he wasn't centered in a flock of 'em he'd have the peachiest little bud of the collection off in a corner, holdin' her hand and lettin' her tell him what an awful flirt he was. Oh, Bradley was some speed when it came to skirts. I can't quote any vital statistics, but my guess is that his average was almost two busted hearts a week.

Mother used to brag a bit about it to Sadie, who didn't see Bradley just as I did. In fact, Sadie thought he was an entertainin' kid. I know she chuckled a lot over what Mrs. Ward told her about how frequent Bradley shifted the photo he kept in the big silver frame on his chiffonnier.

"He's having such a good time, though," says Sadie. "Isn't he?"

"I expect he is," says I.

What was the use statin' my opinion of

Bradley, when nearly everyone else was so strong for him? When the season was only two-thirds over, though, and Bradley has to beat it back to college early to show up with the football squad, I stood the shock of losin' him noble. I even tried to comfort mother by assurin' her that occasionally them young grid-iron heroes got through their practice work without bein' maimed for life. Not that it was common, but now and then one of 'em came out whole. We would hope for the best.

I ain't sayin' that Mrs. Ward was any sillier over Bradley than fond mammas usually are about only sons, but she did spread the agony around thick at times. Bein' a somewhat jumpy and emotional widow, and not ownin' an Airedale or a Pekinese, she just naturally took it out that way.

So this here panicky stuff she pulls the other night ain't at all surprisin'. It's at another dance, for this winter we was keepin' the club open until after the holidays, windin' up with a grand ball; and as Rockhurst-on-the-Sound is jam full of young folks about this time of year, the affair was turnin' out to be a big event.

Havin' tried four times to resign without gettin' any action, I'm still on the job, thankful that my term of office expires on the last day of the month. I'm there in all the glory of my little old last year's soup-and-fish outfit, caromin' round on the edges of the festivities, openin' and shuttin' windows for the lady

patronesses, now and then divin' into the smokin'-room to drag out a partner for some young bud Sadie is fond of, and makin' myself useful generally. Gee, but I do have such a swell time at a ball! A vegetarian at a beefsteak dinner would have nothing on me.

And then, about midnight, when I'm wonderin' if an early breakaway couldn't be managed, here comes Sadie, all excited over something, and pulls me mysterious into a corner.

"Shorty," she demands, "what has become of Bradley Ward?"

"Not guilty," says I. "I ain't touched a hair of his fair young head."

"Now, don't try to be funny," says she. "This is serious. He's missing. He hasn't been seen on the floor for nearly two hours. Mrs. Ward can't find him anywhere, and she's dreadfully worried about him."

"I know," says I. "Some of them dashin' brunettes has kidnapped him."

"Nonsense!" says Sadie. "He danced two or three times with that Polly Malone early in the evening. She's the latest, you know. But Polly's over there sitting out a one-step with Craig Warner, and we can't imagine what has become of Bradley. See if you can't find him."

"Suppose I could?" says I. "What then?"

"You might find out what's the matter, if anything," says Sadie. "At least, you could tell his mother that he was all right."

"Oh, very well," says I, strollin' off.

I must say, I couldn't get much worked up over this disappearance, and my enthusiasm for discoverin' Bradley was about minus nothing. Still, I poked around the verandas, peeked into the cloak-room, and finally wandered into the café. And there, 'way round in a corner alone at a table, sits the missing one. He's gazin' moody at a slender-stemmed glass he's holdin' up to the light, a little glass with four or five different colored kinds of booze in it.

"Huh!" says I, driftin' up close and inspectin' the drink. "What kind of dope is that? A barber's delight or a liquid layer cake?"

Bradley, he eyes me cold and distant.

"Pousse café," says he, sippin' off the top section. Then, droppin' his frappé manners, he sort of leers at me and adds: "My fourth."

"Wha-a-at!" I gasps. "Four doses like that? Tryin' to make a giddy rainbow of yourself? Say, what do you think will happen to you if you keep on?"

"I don't care what happens to me," says Bradley, tossin' off the rest of the stuff.

"As bad as that, eh?" says I. "You'll feel different about 9 A.M. to-morrow mornin', when you have to jump a train back to college."

He favors me with a weary, condescendin' smile.

"I'm off the college stuff forever," says he. "I've decided to quit."

"Well, well!" says I. "What you found as a substitute?"

"I'm going to cut loose from—from all this," says he, wavin' his hand vague at a stack of chairs and tables. "I'm either going to the demnition dachshunds or else be a man. Maybe I'll run over and join the Foreign Legion."

"Oh, I see!" says I. "Desperate Desmond, eh?"

"I'm desperate, all right," says he.

"If I could have one guess," says I, "I'll bet I could name the girl."

"Oh, no, you couldn't," says he. "It—it's a woman this time."

"But the last bulletin I had," I insists, "it was little Polly Malone."

How was I to know that was goin' to set him off so tragic? He jumps up, glares menacin' at me across the table, and mutters hoarse:

"Curse you! What right have you butting into my affairs this way?"

"Easy now, son," says I. "There's no call for heavy breathin'. I'm a rescue expedition, that's all, sent out by mother, who's worryin' herself into a cat-fit on your account."

"Huh!" says he. "She's always throwing those. I'm no babe in arms."

"No," says I; "but when you take to doin' interior decoratin' with Roman-stripe sundaes, and talk about joinin' foreign legions, just because a wisp of a girl has——"

"See here, McCabe," he breaks in. "I'd just

like to have Paula Malone hear you call her that. I'd like to be around, that's all."

"Nothin' simpler," says I. "I ain't seen much of Polly for a year or two, but we used to be fairly good friends. She is out there in the ball-room now, chattin' with that old sport Craig Warner, but I think I could edge in if I tried. And maybe I might patch up this awful state of affairs between you and her. That is, if you got nerve enough to sort of drift up casual after I've ditched Craig. Have you?"

"Yes," says he, settin' his jaw firm. "I'll not give her up without another try."

Course, it all listens mighty simple to me. Why, the last I knew, this little Polly Malone was just a kid with a thick braid of copper-tinted hair hangin' down her back and an impish twinkle in her big eyes. I'd known her dad ever since he started in the contractin' business out here in Rockhurst. It was me got him to join the club. Not that either him or Mrs. Malone was the sort who'd have much use for such joints; for they're plain, stay-at-home folks. But we needed the money, and Jim Malone was comin' on, so he could easy spare it.

All I'd heard recent about Polly was that she'd developed into something of a singer, and had been livin' with an aunt in the city these past two winters, havin' her voice cultivated.

But say, when I scouts around the ball-room for her, and finally recognizes who it is that's

sittin' rollin' her eyes at Craig Warner, hanged if I don't let out a gasp. Blamed if Bradley ain't right. Wisp of a girl!

Why, say, this party in the snappy evenin' dress with the rhinestone shoulder straps is as much grown up as a lot of grandmothers I could name. And talk about your bold faces! Honest, if I hadn't had any clue, I should have placed her as some Sioux City divorcée just on from gettin' her decree.

Still, I'd contracted to arbitrate between her and Bradley, so I remembers how I used to rough-house with her when I'd drop in of an evenin' to see Jim, and I proceeds to do the goat act the best I knew how.

"Well, Polly," says I, walkin' up and pinchin' her by the ear, "who gave you license to grow up so sudden?"

"Why, Uncle Shorty!" says she, grabbin' my arm and pullin' me down beside her. "I've been wondering how long before you were going to be decent enough to come and speak to me. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Let's see if I have the next number taken. Yes; but I'll scratch out the name and you may sit it out with me."

And, as Craig couldn't very well converse with her left shoulder-blade, he murmurs something polite and strolls off. A second later Bradley slips into his place without Polly's noticin' the shift.

Some pert little prattler, Polly is, take it

from me. I couldn't tell whether she thought she was flirtin' with me or just bein' chummy, but it sure was a zippy line of chat she unreels. Had me almost dizzy tryin' to follow her, and it's only by bracin' myself solid that I makes a quick shift to the subject I'd come to discuss.

"Yes, that's all right, Polly," says I. "You got me kidded to a standstill. But say, what about this break between you and Bradley Ward?"

"Oh!" says Polly, shruggin' her white shoulders. "Bradley! That's so. I wonder what has become of the dear boy?"

"You little sinner!" says I. "Just as if you hadn't let him through the trap-door on purpose. Now, own up: what's the grand trouble between you two?"

"Why, how absurd, Uncle Shorty!" says Polly, givin' me a playful pat. "As if I am accountable for every youngster who—wants to scribble his name all over my dance order."

"Youngster!" says I. "Polly, you're nineteen yourself, aren't you?"

"I'm twenty, so there!" she pouts.

"So is Bradley," says I.

"But these college boys are so amazingly young at that," says Polly. "And all they can talk about is their silly little campus pranks, and what the head coach told them the day of the big game, and the awfully unfunny jokes in the last college monthly. And they never think

of offering you a cigarette or letting you have a sip of cocktail."

"Why, Polly Malone!" says I.

"Paula, please," says she. "I despise being called Polly."

"It used to be Pauline," says I.

"My professional name will be Paula," says she. "I'm going on next season, you know—just a chorus part, but you wait."

"You're not going to forget all the nice young chaps you've grown up with, are you?" I asks.

"You've said it," says she. "They are so hopelessly young. Really, they've bored me almost to distraction to-night. Do you know what I call 'em? Trundle-bed trash."

"Not—not Bradley?" I asks.

"Oh, no," laughs Paula mischievous. "He's the leading juvenile."

I thought I heard kind of a hissing sound, like someone was breathin' violent through their front teeth, and I glances past Paula's copper-colored hair just in time to see the back of Bradley's head as he sneaks off. His ears was glowin' like a fresh painted fire hydrant.

"There goes another dance," I suggests, as the orchestra strikes up. "You'll be wanting to——"

"No," says Paula; "I'd much rather talk to you, Uncle Shorty. Besides, I want a claret lemonade."

Well, I had to take her into the grill-room and

get her what she wanted. It was nervy of her, though, to hold up Craig for a cigarette.

"Polly," says I, "I'm chairman of the house committee, and if you light up that dope stick in here I'll be court-martialed—maybe lose my job forever."

"Pooh!" says Paula. "I'll only take a few puffs behind my fan."

As soon as I could, too, I started her towards home in a taxi. Then I hunted up Bradley. He had his mink-lined overcoat on and was just orderin' the limousine for himself and mother.

"Tough luck, son," says I. "But I hadn't figured on your havin' the complaint so bad. Bein' young, though, is a thing you may outgrow; but I doubt if you ever catch up with Polly."

"Bah!" says he. "Who wants to?"

"Glad you feel different about it," says I, "seein' how my little helpin'-hand scheme got wrecked."

"Yes, it did!" says he peevish. "Think you're some comedian, don't you, framing up a roast like that for me? Say, McCabe, what did I ever do to you?"

"I'll never tell," says I. "But whatever it was, Bradley, we break even."

CHAPTER XV

SHOWING UP BRICK HARTLEY

One of the chief points about livin' in a monthly-ticket burg like Rockhurst-on-the-Sound is that you can be just as private a private citizen as you want. We commuters, when we've paid our taxes and Yacht Club dues, figure we've indulged in about all the citizenship required, and let it go at that. Except once in a while. And say——

But maybe I'd better start with the other night. I'd had my reg'lar after-dinner rough-house with Master Sully, and was just takin' a good-night peep at little sister snoozin' away in her crib, when Sadie, who's been openin' the nursery windows, reports a limousine stoppin' out front.

"Is it Pinckney or the Purdy-Pells?" says I.

"Neither," says she. "Three men are getting out, two in evening clothes. You'd better go down."

"I will," says I, "and ask that odd guy what he means. The nerve of him!"

But when I finds it's the Reverend Farnum, the new Episcopal rector, I lets it pass. With a vest that's sewed to him and a collar that buttons behind, he has some excuse for not

changin'. You can expect a rector to blow in any time, too, but why the rest of the trio should be trailin' along is a puzzler.

One is Wally Phelps, who lives in the big near-Moorish house down on the Point; and the other is H. Trevor Peebles, who does the English country gentleman stunt at his place back up on the hills beyond the Country Club.

"Well, gentlemen," says I, wavin' 'em to take chairs around the livin'-room fireplace, "this is nice and neighborly of you."

The Reverend Farnum takes that as his speech cue. A chunky little gent he is, with a round, boyish face, a premature sprinklin' of gray over his ears, and a smooth, gentle voice that he don't more'n half hate usin'.

"My dear Mr. McCabe," says he, "we are here on a civic duty rather than for social relaxation."

"Eh?" says I, gawpin'. "Somebody been accusin' me of keepin' pigs or not havin' my gutters shoveled?"

"Oh, not at all; nothing of the kind," says he. "But, preliminary to stating the major purpose of our errand, may we ask you, in all confidence, your precise attitude towards—er—ah—Brickett Hartley?"

"Who, Brick?" says I. "Why, I expect I feel a good deal the same about him as the rest of you do. He's a political high-binder, a strong-arm grafter, a blot on the 'scutcheon—all that sort of thing."

"Ah-h-h-h!" says the Reverend Farnum. "Quite so, quite so!"

"What then?" says I. "He's a dead one, ain't he?"

"We trust so," says the Reverend Farnum, almost like he was endin' a prayer.

And then he proceeds to state item No. 2 on this program of civic duty. He wants to know if I'll take a place with them as directors on the County Sanatorium board.

"What, me?" says I. "What do I know about runnin' a T. B. hospital?"

Accordin' to the Reverend Farnum, that ain't the point. It was a case of removin' from the control of such a person as Brick Hartley this institution of which the county was justly proud. These two other eminent and highly respected citizens had agreed to serve. Would I join them in making a personal sacrifice for the public good?

"Oh, well," says I, "if you think I can be of any use."

The Reverend Farnum inhales another "Ah-h-h-h!" and adds:

"Then you accept? Good! It has been suggested that we put you in as chairman in place of Mr. Hartley. We are to meet this evening to organize. I trust you are at liberty. We will go down at once."

"Eh?" says I. "Goin' to do it just like that?"

I has to grin, too, as I gazes around at this

little group of amateur steam-rollerites. For, all in a flash, I gets a light on this sudden popularity of mine. You won't follow me, though, unless you're posted on what happened here last election, and maybe, durin' the excitement of settlin' whether it was to be Hughes or Wilson, you overlooked the fact that we had a little county campaign on the side. But we did.

It was one of them rare cases when the commuter bunch forgot about New York and remembered they was payin' taxes out here. That's what did it, taxes. Brick Hartley and his gang had run the rate up a little too high.

So there was a Citizens' Committee organized, and by whooping things up six weeks in advance of the primaries they got 'most everybody registered. An illustrated pamphlet, "The High Cost of Brick," was the big card. It was got up by Henry Russell Adams—you know, the muck-rake specialist—and it sure was a hummer. Any tax-payer who could read that through and not see where he'd been frisked out of a lot of cash by Boss Hartley—well, he couldn't dodge it, that's all. I hear Brick only grunted when it got to him. He'd bucked these fool reformers before.

"Listen wicked, don't they?" he told one of his henchmen. "But do you know what they'll be doin' election day? Playin' golf! Huh!"

Maybe they did, too. But they voted first—some of 'em for the first time in years. More'n that, they had plenty of watchers at the polls.

I was one. And I expect it was a little disturbance I raised in my precinct that made me sort of conspicuous. All I objected to was when Brick's crowd started to throw out about a hundred of our votes.

It was a smear, too. We elected our whole ticket, including all the County Commissioners; and when it was over the Hartley machine looked like the ruins of a shingle-mill after a fire.

Ever since the first of the year, too, the Citizens' Committee had been pokin' around in the wreckage. Wherever they found an underground pipe leadin' to the Hartley headquarters, they yanked it up. His brother-in-law was fired out of his place as county engineer; his cousin, who'd been Road Commissioner, had the can tied to him. Even his wife's uncle, who was found drawin' down eight hundred a year as assistant janitor of the courthouse, got the run.

The only hold they'd left Brick on anything like an office was this dinky chairmanship of the Sanatorium Board, which didn't even carry the privilege of chargin' up postage stamps. They'd have chucked him out of that if they could; but it's an appointment job, and his term had two years more to run, so the best they could do was to shove in a new chairman. And the one they picks to shoulder Brick Hartley out is me.

I could see where the Reverend Farnum

might get nervous if it was left to him. He'd do it, of course, if he had to, but he'd get clammy-footed and dewy-browed durin' the process, and most likely wouldn't sleep all that night.

Nor I couldn't exactly see Wally Phelps standin' up to Brick Hartley. He's big enough, so far as beef goes. But he's a lumpy, flabby, pasty-faced party, Wally is; a dancin' man at forty—that sort. Bond broker, I understand—had the business left to him. One of the silent, blinkin' kind. The only idea I ever heard him throw out real emphatic was about the sort of dog he liked. "Give me an Airedale, every time," says he. "One-man dog. That's what I want. Ought to see my Tams III."

He's one of our solid citizens, though: owns half a mile of water-front and has two butlers. No more of a swell than H. Trevor Peebles. They're different types. H. Trevor is tall and skinny, well on in the fifties, with a long, thin nose, prominent cheek-bones, and curly gray hair. Used to be a great sport, they tell me; but he's settled enough now, with a third wife and grown children. One of these jumpy, restless ginks, always crossin' or uncrossin' his long legs sudden.

Anyway, neither of 'em would relish walkin' up to Brick Hartley and tellin' him where he got off. I could see that plain enough. But they'd both been stung hard on this tax proposition, and had been rung into the campaign. I

expect they'd been shown, too, where they ought to go on this Sanatorium Board, same as they were tryin' to show me. How was it, though, I hadn't been notified until to-night?

"Lemme see that appointment notice," says I.

The Reverend Farnum hands it over.

"Oh, yes," says I. It was of even date, the ink hardly dry. No tellin' how many others had been slated for that third place before me, or why they'd all side-stepped.

"We ought to be getting along, I presume," says the Reverend Farnum, glancin' at me expectant.

I took a full minute to think it over. Course, I saw why they wanted me. But what of it? It was all in a good cause. Brick had to be finished, ground in the dirt. It was comin' to him. He'd bossed and bullied and grafted long enough. I'd given up my share to him. Hadn't his contractin' firm soaked me good and proper on that curb-and-gutter job? So I ought to be ready to do my bit.

"Come on," says I, gettin' my overcoat.

It seems the sanatorium directors had the use of a room over fire headquarters down in the village, and we finds Brick Hartley talkin' to the driver of the chemical on the ground floor. He nods as we file past, and pretty soon follows us up. We was bunched in a corner with our heads together when Brick marches in. There's a long oak table in the room, half a dozen wood-

bottomed foldin' chairs, and one arm-chair with a cushion. Brick pulls the arm-chair up to one end of the table and plants himself.

He's a heavy-built, slow-motioned party, one of the kind that never makes any false moves or wastes his breath sayin' things before he's thought out just what he means. Even his heavy eyelids lift deliberate, like he wanted to be prepared for whatever he might see.

It ain't a cheerful face. Strong, I expect you'd call it, and gloomy. But if it wasn't for the deep lines and the scar on the left cheek he wouldn't be so bad lookin'. Must have been an ugly smash that left that jagged white mark, shiny as if it had been varnished, and with fine puckerin' around the edges. A blow from a broken bottle, most likely.

"Well, gentlemen?" says he.

For so rough a specimen, he has a surprisin' voice, low and soft, though a bit husky.

We took our places like so many Grade 7 boys gettin' ready to say our hist'ry lessons, and Brick lets them steady, deep-set eyes of his wander over us slow and sort of curious. Nothing exactly hostile in this casual once-over he gives us, nor you couldn't actually call it sneerin'. It's a sort of well-look-who-we-have-here size-up that don't leave you feelin' any too comfortable.

The Reverend Farnum clears his pipes nervous, and starts in on his spiel. If you didn't know, you'd hardly guess what it's all about.

Might have been openin' a mothers' meetin'. And the longer he beats around the bush, the further he gets away from the subject. I was beginnin' to shuffle my feet and chafe my neck against my collar, when Brick breaks in on the flow of language.

"Meanin', I suppose," says he, "that it's time to organize the new board?"

"Precisely," says the Reverend Farnum, gettin' a firm grip on the table edge. "And I nominate for chairman——"

"Just a moment," cuts in Brick, liftin' one of his stubby forefingers an inch or two from the table. "We've been in the habit of havin' the same chairman for three terms runnin': I've been in for two, so far. Thank you, gentlemen; I accept the nomination. Those in favor signify in the usual manner."

The Reverend Farnum was pink in the gills and seemed to be chokin' over something; H. Trevor was scratchin' one ear vigorous; and Wally Phelps was simply starin' bug-eyed. Brick glances inquirin' from one to the other, and just the ghost of a smile flickers in his mouth corners as he goes on:

"If there's no opposition we will——"

Which is when I comes to life.

"What do you think this is you're puttin' over?" says I. "A monologue? Well, you got another guess, Brick. We ain't gathered here to pin any more honors on you, either. Anyway, that wasn't the schedule of events

doped out to me. Mr. Farnum, it's your shoot."

And this time he gets it out without chokin'. I'm the nominee.

"Huh!" says Brick. "So that's your little plan? Goin' to shove me out and put McCabe in, eh? What's the grand idea?"

Once more the Reverend Farnum gives an exhibition of talkin' around a thing without gettin' within arm's length of it. Course, he's tryin' to sketch out to Brick what we think of him, but usin' polite parlor phrases, such as "So you will appreciate, my dear sir, that we deem it best," and so forth and so on. I stood it for three or four minutes before crashin' in, but when I does break through I lands with both feet.

"Ah, for the love of soup!" says I. "Let's ditch the wrist-pattin' stuff. We're goin' to throw you out, Brick, because you're a crook and a grafter. Get that?"

He never bats an eyelash. He just stares at me steady for a second, and when he finds I'm starin' back he hunches his shoulders and remarks quiet:

"Crook and grafter, eh? Can you prove that?"

"When we can," says I, "you'll get a free hair-cut and maybe an easy job peelin' potatoes up the river. But I expect you've covered your tracks well. No matter. We don't need proofs. We've got the votes."

"Question, please!" pipes up the Reverend Farnum.

"Second the motion!" mumbles Wally Phelps.

Brick takes no notice of 'em. His square chin has dropped a trifle nearer the big pearl stick-pin that ornaments his striped four-in-hand. He seems to be thinkin'. And when he's ready he rouses up.

"Now, what's the use?" he asks. "You reformers have got everything else. You've picked me as clean as a cold-storage chicken, all except one pin-feather—this no-account place as head of the sanatorium board. There ain't a dollar in it. And you won't like messin' around with them lungers. You'll shy what little work there is. Why not leave it to me?"

This time I didn't give the Reverend Farnum a chance to start his conversational squat-tag.

"Brick," says I, "we're through leavin' things to you. It's too expensive. And if this is such a triflin' job, what do you want to hang on to it for?"

"I'll tell you," says he. "I helped build that sanatorium. I didn't think much of the scheme at first, I'll admit; but that young Dr. Roelke talked me around. I said I'd put it through if he'd go in as superintendent. We've worked together on it for six years now and I—well, I'm sort of interested in the thing."

"Ye-e-es," says I. "You was interested in

the new courthouse too, that cost the county two million. You was interested in the creek bridge —half a million more. You got all het up over the trolley extensions, and handed over franchises at a midnight session with the doors locked. Course you're interested. But do you think you can buffalo us all the time? Ah, come!"

The Reverend Farnum is right there with the follow-up. "I think Mr. McCabe has, in his forceful way," says he, "expressed our attitude, Mr. Hartley. I insist on the vote being taken."

"Just as you say," says Brick.

He knows when he's beat. The minute it's over, he gets out of the arm-chair, puts on his hat, and starts to leave. At the door he stops.

"I don't suppose I'll figure very prominent on any of the committees?" says he.

"You've guessed it," says I.

He chews that over a second, and then comes back to the table.

"Then I might as well get out entirely," says he. "Well, I will. Not right away, though. I'd like to hang on until I've had a chance to show you what we're doing up there—what we're plannin'."

"Oh, sure!" says I.

"When could you go up with me?" he asks.

"To-morrow," says I.

"Good!" says he. "I'll pick you up in my machine. About ten, say?"

I nods. With that, Brick Hartley drifts out and we're left with things all our own way. It wasn't so much satisfaction. Inside of ten minutes we'd discovered that we knew as much about managin' a sanatorium as we did about assemblin' a mince-pie or conductin' a steel plant. We decides unanimous that before we gets in any deeper we ought to find out what this institution looks like, how it's bein' run, and so on.

"Then let's all go up to-morrow," I suggests.

Somehow they ain't so strong for that. They each proceeds to put in an alibi, some of 'em two or three. They was sure I could dig up all the information by myself.

"We'll leave it to you, McCabe," says Wally Phelps.

"Absolutely," adds Peebles. "You're chairman, you know."

So that's how Brick Hartley and I come to put in the best part of the day together inspectin' this big cream-colored stucco buildin' up on the hilltop in the north end of the county. And say, in a few hours him and that Dr. Roelke had thrown at me more facts than I could stow away in a year—about ward groupin', segregation, diet kitchens, solariums, scientific sleepin' porches—I don't know what all. They showed me what was needed—a new heating system, another wing for convalescents, more books for the libr'y, a small pipe organ maybe for the assembly room, better quarters

for the nurses. They got out the accounts, so I could see just how the annual appropriation was stretched to the limit.

Oh, yes, I saw the patients too—rows of 'em in wheeled cots, out in the sun and crisp air; others in steamer chairs, a dozen or more that was 'most cured out buildin' a toboggan slide. And last we inspected the annex for youngsters.

"What!" says I. "All these kids with that? You don't mean it!"

"Incipient cases," says the doc. "But they would all develop the trouble later on if we didn't nip it in the bud. We can save 'em now. We have saved 'em,—hundreds."

"And if you don't mind," adds Brick, "don't let on anything while we're in here about—about my being out. I think a lot of these kids and—and some of 'em—well, they like me, you see."

It's a fact, they did. Only a few was bad enough to be in cots. The rest was up and runnin' around as lively as any youngsters. They'd been havin' school in a big, half-open room; but when the teacher saw us comin' she smiles and declares an extra recess.

And how them kids did swarm around Brick Hartley! Almost mobbed him, in fact. In a minute they had him down in a chair. A little girl with big blue eyes and yellow curls had climbed on one of his knees and was tryin' to tell him something about a doll he'd sent her, while the other knee is occupied by a black-

eyed little Dago boy who's just as excited about something else. And others was crowdin' round, waitin' their turn. The doc and I stood off and watched the performance.

"What is it you call this?" I asks. "The pre—pre——"

"Prematorium," says he. "It is entirely separate from the rest of the institution: separate nursing staff, separate play-grounds, everything."

"But I didn't notice it figurin' on the books," says I.

"No," says he. "It—it doesn't."

"Eh?" says I, suspectin' I'd run down something crooked. "Why not?"

"I suppose you might as well know first as last," says he. "This is Mr. Hartley's personal contribution."

"You don't mean," I gasps, "that Brick Hartley—that he puts up for all this?"

"Every dollar," says Dr. Roelke. "It wouldn't be here if he didn't. Rather a new idea, prematoriums, you know. We couldn't get the commissioners to see it. So he did it on his own hook."

"Then—then," says I, "it's him who's saving all those kids?"

"Yes," says the doc. "You've no idea how wrapped up he is in this work. He's going to miss it, being out of it all."

I glances over at Brick, cuddlin' up a youngster with each arm and tryin' to smile cheerful.

He didn't want 'em to know this would be his last visit. That's enough for me. I'm just as quick throwin' in the reverse as I am catchin' the forward speeds.

"Say, doc," says I, "I got a hunch he ain't goin' to be out of it so much as he thinks. I've just decided I won't make such a swell chairman, after all. I'll tell him about it goin' back."

Which I did. He listens quiet, and then shakes his head. "You're all right, McCabe," says he, "and I'm much obliged. But you can't swing that highbrow bunch after you."

"Them!" says I. "Watch me! Why, in half an hour I could have 'em jumpin' through hoops. You wait until I tell 'em what's on the other side of Brick Hartley—the side they ain't seen."

We had another meetin' last night; and, if I do say it myself, I'm some grand little resigner. I put it to 'em strong, all about the prematorium and the kids and everything. Then I winds up by namin' Mr. Brickett Hartley for his old place. The ayes had it. And when I looks over to Brick, to motion him to take the arm-chair again, blamed if there ain't a drop of brine tricklin' down one side of his nose.

CHAPTER XVI

TIME OUT FOR JOAN

I REMEMBER now of Sadie's readin' the headlines from the paper while I was toyin' with a few poached eggs and a platter of breakfast bacon. But I guess I wasn't takin' any special notice.

"Just think, Shorty," says she. "Fanueil Adams Winthrop! Why, it was his mother who was being entertained at the Twombley-Cranes' when we were there last fall."

"Eh?" says I. "Not the frosty old dame you wouldn't let me go near, for fear I'd make some break?"

Sadie nods.

"Even Twombley-Crane himself was a little afraid of her," says she. "They are the real thing in Black Bay patricians, those Boston Winthrops, you know. Ambassador to somewhere, her husband had been, hadn't he?"

"I expect so," says I. "Anyway, I was told he left her a bale of stock in more'n a hundred different electric-light and street-car companies scattered through the South and West. So he could afford to be 'most anything. What about the young chap, though?"

"Eloped," says Sadie. "Some Western girl.

From a Washington sanitarium. Or, rather, he was kidnapped. It sounds more like that to me; for young Mr. Winthrop was in a sanitarium recovering from a nervous breakdown. The school was in the next block, and I suppose this young minx just captured him when he was off his guard. Some of them are quite equal to that sort of thing. But think how his poor mother must feel."

"Don't!" says I. "Lay off the sob stuff or you'll have me weepin' into the coffee."

It might have been a sad case, all right, but I had to catch the 8.03 to town. And, somehow, goin' down in the smoker, nobody mentioned that particular tragedy, so by the time I hits the Physical Culture Studio it had gone out of my mind completely.

I've no sooner hung up my coat and hat, though, than Swifty Joe points to a telegram that he's laid careful on top of the water-cooler. It's a night letter from Chicago, and reads like this:

> Am tied up here on a big deal. Look after Joan until I can get there. I've wired her to hunt you up. And don't believe all you read about her in the fool papers. The kiddie's all right. If that young whelp Winthrop isn't on the level hold him until I can get at him.
>
> WILLIAM DUTTON.

"Whew!" says I. "Boiling Bill! And Joan must be that girl of his. But who is this

—oh, Winthrop! Hey, Swifty! Chase out and get me the mornin' papers—all of 'em."

Say, that's what you get by havin' a past in which you've accumulated friends like Boiling Bill Dutton. I got to admit, though, that at the time I needed him most he was a friend worth havin'. Back in my early ring days that was, the year before I pulled down the big belt. It was one night in the old Coates House in Kansas City. Texy McKay was my manager then, and we'd come on to negotiate a finish affair with Spider Tracy, who was one of the two or three that stood between me and the championship.

We'd raked up a couple of thousand for a side bet, and thought we had quite a roll until the Spider's backers flashed theirs. Two thousand! Why, Spider wouldn't go into trainin' for a mess of chicken feed like that. If we could make it five they might listen, but they was lookin' for some reg'lar guys that could hang up ten and go 70-30 on the gate receipts.

"All right," says Texy. "We'll bet you the Klondike against the Philadelphia mint, if you like."

But they was makin' us look like pikers just the same, and had us almost bluffed into hoppin' a freight train East, when this rugged-faced gent with the bristly red hair elbows to the front and announces that he's ready to cover for me anything up to twenty thousand. He had the certified checks on him too, and

when he urges 'em to toss their contribution into the safe, all they could actually show was forty-five hundred. So we closed at that, and it was three days after I'd put Spider to sleep in the fifth round that this unknown shows up to pat me on the back and lug off his end of the winnin's.

By that time, though, I knew more or less about him. He was a big lumber operator, one of the yellow pine plungers from down Little Rock way, and I expect he'd skinned the government out of more stumpage than the land agents knew was on the maps. But he was always square as a brick with me, givin' me an even split on that forty-five, and never lettin' out a squeal when it come my turn to take the count. Instead, every time he gets on to New York he has to blow into the Studio here, drag me out for a Palm-Room luncheon, and afterwards load me up with an Eastern rug or a Sheffield platter, or something like that, as a souvenir of his visit.

So, when he calls on me for a little return favor, you can bet I'm goin' to deliver as good as I've got in stock. Look after Joan? Well, I'd be a welcher if I didn't try, wouldn't I. And my first play is to post myself as to just what kind of a mix-up it is she's got into.

"Here's the lot," says Swifty, dumpin' an armful of papers on my desk. "All but a couple of Yiddisher sheets they don't carry."

"Wha-a-a-at!" says I, glancin' at the collection, which includes everything from the *Tribune* to *Il Progressero* and the *Morgen Journal.* "Swifty, you got a mind like a rubber stamp. When I said all the mornin' papers, did you think I— Ah, what's the use!"

And say, Miss Joan Dutton sure was figurin' some in the public prints. "Young Black Bay Heir Lured from Sanitarium," was one of the headlines. "Couldn't Resist Smiles of Super-Woman," was another.

One paper runs a two-column cut of Mrs. Faneuil Adams Winthrop, Sr., and an insert of the Winthrop home on Beacon Street, showin' all the windows boarded up. Another splurges on a picture of Marmaduke Hall, which is the name of the school, and a long interview with the head of the joint where young Winthrop had been a patient.

Seems it was kind of a nerve-cure institution, and the Doc who ran it claimed to be a second or third cousin of the Winthrops. Accordin' to him, young Fanueil had been sufferin' from melancholia of the mind, brought on by too much post-graduate work at Harvard.

"Distinctly a shy young man," the Doc told the interviewer, "almost a recluse, and one who had particularly avoided young women."

Near as I could make out from the various accounts, Joan had stirred up quite a mess. There had been two other girls in it, but their

names wasn't mentioned. Anyway, it was hinted that Joan had been the one who'd smuggled young Winthrop into the school gymnasium, and he was there with the three of 'em when a teacher who'd seen the place lighted up strolled in. Also it had been Joan who had disappeared, after having been locked in her room. Fanueil, too, was among the missin'.

"Zing-g-g!" says I, runnin' my fingers through my hair. "For a modest party like me, this is some proposition. I wonder how soon I've got to——"

"Say," cuts in Swifty, whisperin' husky, "there's a young lady at the front office door. What'll I do?"

"I wish we could nail it up, Swifty," says I. "But we can't. So tow her in."

Maybe you can guess what I was lookin' for—one of these baby-doll chickens with Theda Bara eyes and snaky motions. But say, the young female person that drifts in don't answer to any of them specifications. Not one. She's a slim, wispy young lady, to begin with, and no more of a dashin' beauty than I am. In fact, she's kind of plain—pale yellow hair, a perky nose with freckles on it, a narrow, tight-lipped little mouth, and sea-green eyes. Besides, she's gazin' around sort of timid.

Perhaps I'd been too hasty about concludin' that she was the one. She might be some stray from the music conservatory on the top floor, or a canvasser for the Belgian Fund.

"Well, Miss," says I, "did you get the wrong number?"

"I think not," says she. "You're Professor McCabe, aren't you?"

"I can't deny it," says I; "but who——"

"I am Joan Dutton," says she.

"Eh?" I gasps. "Well, blamed if you look it."

"Why not?" says she.

"Well," says I, "you don't, that's all. But you're runnin' on her schedule. I just had a wire from your father."

"I know," says she. "Dear old daddy! I had one, too. He said I was to come to you. So here I am."

"Ye-e-e-es," says I. "And where's the other half of the sketch—Fanueil?"

"Goodness knows," says she. "After he put me on the train last night I started him back to the sanitarium."

"Then—then you didn't elope?" says I.

"Of course not, you goose," says Joan. "Daddy hasn't seen him yet, so I couldn't tell whether he would do or not. But how did you know about Fanueil?"

"How?" says I. "Great Scott, young woman, ain't you seen the papers? Why, you and young Winthrop are on every front page. Take a look."

And I spreads out some of the headlines for her to inspect.

She sits down, takes the pile of papers in

her lap, and begins runnin' through 'em casual. And I must say, for anybody that was workin' up a vampire rep, she's kind of a comfortable, easy-goin', chirky young party. She don't seem to be much disturbed by what she reads about herself. Most of the time she smiles, and now and then she lets out a giggle.

"Joan of Ark., am I?" says she. "That's rather clever, isn't it? But from some of these accounts one would think I was a most awful person, wouldn't they? You might think I'd stolen Fanueil, or cast a spell on him—while, as a matter of fact, here I am, and he is——"

"Say," breaks in Swifty, "there's a young gink out here askin' for Miss Dutton."

With that I gives him the nod, and in leaks a tall, solemn-faced young gent wearin' huge shell-rimmed glasses and luggin' a leather shoppin' bag, the kind you see on Tremont Street.

"Why, Fanueil!" exclaims Joan. "Didn't I tell you you mustn't come until after daddy got here?"

"But—but I couldn't stay there—without you, Joan," says he. "I simply couldn't."

"Then why not go home to mother?" she demands.

He shakes his head.

"Don't! Please!" says he.

"Then you'll have to ask Professor McCabe," says Joan. "I'm in his charge now. Isn't that so, Professor?"

"I expect it is," says I. "But I suppose the young man can stick around for a while, now he's here. Swifty, fetch another chair. We'll make a reg'lar party of it. And maybe, between you, I can dope out what this is all about. You've seen the papers, ain't you, Winthrop?"

He drops his chin in his hands and groans.

"I trust you do not believe all those terrible things about—about Miss Dutton," says he.

"Oh, for goodness' sake, cheer up, Fanueil!" says Joan. "Certainly he doesn't. Do you, Professor?"

"Course," says I, "I don't fall for more'n half this sensational stuff. Still, I expect there must have been something in it. Just what, now? About you bein' lured from the sanitarium, for instance?"

Joan indulges in another giggle.

"I lost a ten-pound box of candy on that," says she. "You see, we used to pass the place every day on our way to the riding academy, and Fanueil was nearly always moping around outside. Such a gloomy face! Look at him. That's a sample. Isn't that doleful?"

It was. A sad mule lookin' for supper would have seemed chipper along side of him; but I didn't feel like mentionin' the fact.

"So you bet you could chase the glooms, eh?" I asks.

"I said I could make him smile," says Joan.

"Dorothea Mills said it couldn't be done, and I —I bet her. I was to have a week.

"I suppose it was rather a bold thing to do, but the very next day I just made him speak to me—dropped my riding-crop right in front of him, you know; and when I thanked him I asked him if he couldn't forget it. 'Forget what?' says he. 'That little kittens are born blind,' I says. 'Oh, I say!' says he. 'Why don't you, then?' says I. Then he blushed. 'Perhaps you will to-morrow,' says I. 'Remember, I'm the girl with the near-red hair.' But you didn't smile, did you, Fanueil?"

Fanueil shakes his head.

"His sense of humor is ingrowing," goes on Joan, "but otherwise he's quite human. Next day he was waiting for me, and walked clear to the riding academy. By the fourth day we were nicely acquainted. Never a smile, though. I'd talked a lot of rot to him, too. Hadn't I, Fanueil?

"Something desperate had to be done, so I asked him if he wouldn't like to join our little German band. Do you know that, Professor? It's a song in which each one of the chorus tries to imitate some instrument. When Roberta Marsh does it it's a scream. That's why I asked her to lead. Dorothea had agreed to help, too.

"Well, Fanueil knew nothing about it, but he said he'd come, and I opened the back gate for him. We went right into the gym, and started

"ALL OF A SUDDEN I HEARS GURGLIN' SOUNDS FROM YOUNG WINTHROP. HE'S STABBIN' HIS FINGER OUT THE WINDOW FRANTIC. 'KENO! I WIN, JOAN. I WIN!'"

telling Fanueil he was to do the boom-boom for the bass drum. It isn't so funny at first; but as the verses go on, and everyone gets to doing his part—well, it gets to be simply too absurd for words.

"We were marching around the gym, all coming in on the chorus, and Fanueil was almost on the point of smiling, when in came that snoopy Miss Strickler. I tried to tell her, but she wouldn't listen. Then she brought the principal, and—oh, they raised no end of a row. You've no idea how catty these old-maid schoolteachers can be. They locked me in my room and wired a lot of rubbish to daddy.

"That was when Fanueil proved himself a regular movie hero. He demanded that they let me out, and when they wouldn't he came around at night with a ladder.

"That was when he began proposing, too. Such a silly! As though I'd marry a graven image! Besides, there was daddy, who'd never seen him. But I wouldn't stay another night in that old school. So I sent a message to daddy, told him to meet me in New York, and climbed down the ladder. There! That's all there is to it. Isn't it, Fanueil?"

Young Winthrop nods.

"Except this," says he, indicatin' the heap of papers on the floor and sighin' deep.

"Pooh!" says Joan. "What do we care for that? Do cheer up, Fanueil, for goodness'

sake. I'll tell you! Show me New York. I haven't been here since I was a little girl, and I'm just crazy to see the sights."

"Just a minute," I puts in. "You know, I'm supposed to be lookin' after you."

"Then you must come too, Professor," says Joan. "It's a gorgeous morning. Let's get a taxi and ride until luncheon-time."

"I have one waiting outside," says Fanueil.

She's a lively, snappy young person, and all that; but, as I sits there watchin' 'em from the extra taxi seat, I can't frame up why he's so dippy about her. For that's what it amounts to. Here he has chucked everything, his happy sanitarium home and so on, and now he sits gazin' at her soulful and sad, like a setter dog that's been told there'll be no quail shootin' to-day.

But then, it's about fifty-fifty between 'em, for Fanueil ain't any he-charmer himself. Oh, he's no freak, understand, and of course there's no denyin' his Bunker Hill blood and the Winthrop investments. But that no-smile record of his would queer him with 'most any girl. Seems like it only makes him more interestin' to Joan, though.

"Oh, I know!" says she, after we've had a spin up Riverside Drive and are swingin' back through the park to Fifth Avenue. "Let's play zipp-whiskers."

"Beg pardon?" says Fanueil.

"It's a variation of roadside whist," ex-

plains Joan. "You count only whiskers, though."

"Whiskers?" echoes Fanueil, starin' vague.

"It's like this," goes on Joan. "When you see a person with an ordinary, close-cropped beard, you say, 'Zipp-for-ten.' When you find one with old-fashioned chop-whiskers and mustache—Chaunceys—you say, 'Zipp-for-twenty.' A full flowing beard counts fifty, and you must shout, 'Keno!' And the one who calls first gets the count. When you call wrong, a twenty-zipp for a ten, that sets you back just so much. And we'll make the game one hundred. Now! Are you ready?"

"I—I think so," says Fanueil, kind of doubtful.

"And you'll keep count for us, won't you, Professor?" says Joan. "Good! Then we'll start. Either side of the street you know. Only they must be in plain sight and— Ah! Zipp-for-ten! Zipp-for-ten!"

And Joan points to a sporty old boy strollin' down the sunny side of the avenue. Sure enough, he's wearin' a Van Dyke.

"Don't the red tie score extra?" I asks.

"Of course not," says Joan, givin' me a merry flash from them sea-green eyes. "Nothing counts but— Oh, zipp-for-ten again! What's the matter, Fanueil? Can't you see them? That one went right past on your side."

"I know," says Fanueil; "but you said it first. I must be rather stupid."

"Then show a little pep," says Joan. "It isn't any fun unless we're both——"

"Oh, I say!" breaks in Fanueil. "Zipp-for—er—zipp-for-twenty."

"No count!" says Joan, glancin' out at a set of Deacons drivin' by in a limousine. "You must point, you know."

"Oh!" says Fanueil.

And say, Miss Joan sure does have a quick eye for whiskers. She had a game before Fanueil had even tallied ten.

"Now we'll play this one for fifty cents a side," suggests Joan, "and I'll start you forty up. Come, now. Look sharp."

"By Jove!" says Fanueil, jabbin' his finger towards a store door. "Zipp-for-ten!"

"Right!" says Joan. "You're catching on. Zipp-for-ten for me."

Well, this time it wasn't so one-sided. With his forty start, Fanueil had rolled up a score of eighty, and it looked like he stood to win the purse; but then Joan runs a string of tens, and all of a sudden spots a full set of white lambrequins crossin' Madison Square.

"Keno!" says she. "That puts me out."

"I say," says Fanueil, wipin' his glasses careful, "I'll just go you again—even this time. This—this is rather good sport, you know."

He's almost enthusiastic about it, and as we

swings down through the cloak and suit district, where face herbage is more common, they was both sittin' on the edge of the seat cushions. I had all I could do to jot down the numbers on the back of an envelop, for they was callin' 'em out fast. Fanueil would have won, too, if he hadn't miscalled a pair of butlers for Chaunceys and gone twenty in the hole. But now he has his sportin' blood stirred and is anxious to go on.

"Where next, sir?" asks the taxi driver of me, as we crosses Union Square.

"Canal and over through Allen and Hester streets," says I.

If they was lookin' for whiskers, I thought they might as well go where the huntin' was good. They'd made the game five hundred by this time and doubled the stakes. And, believe me, when we gets down where we begun to see kosher signs on the windows, the sport is some excitin'. I believe Joan had something like three hundred and fifty to Fanueil's two hundred and forty when we crossed Third Avenue goin' East. Joan was somewhat twisted up tryin' to count three zipp-for-tens in a bunch, when all of a sudden I hears gurglin' sounds from young Winthrop. He's leanin' half-way out the taxi window, stabbin' his finger frantic, and callin' out excited:

"Keno! Keno! Keno! I win, Joan. Look!"

Well, you know what you can expect of a

Saturday mornin' down on the corner of Canal and Second Avenue. Come to find out later on, it's a delegation goin' to inspect some new synagogue, but to Fanueil it's just an amazin' run of luck. And it busts up his long-standin' spell of melancholia like an ice jam goin' out with a spring freshet.

"Keno!" he sings out. "Ha-ha! Keno some more! Ho, ho! Ten kenos at once; no, twelve! Oh, my! Did anyone ever see so many whiskers together? See them, Joan; see them?"

He's rockin' back and forth on the seat, laughin' like he would split a seam, and pointin' at the synagogue delegation. I'd begun to suspicion they wouldn't like it, for they're jabberin' among themselves and scowlin' our way; but I didn't look for 'em to get quite so hot over it. First thing we know, though, the taxi is surrounded, and half a dozen of 'em are statin' their opinions of us emphatic.

But Fanueil seems to be off the gloom stuff for keeps. He goes right on laughin'. Maybe it's because he ain't done it for so long that when he gets started he don't know how to stop. Anyway, the more whiskers he saw waggin' around him, the heartier he haw-haws. Honest, they had him almost pulled out of the taxi, and there was a fine young mob gatherin', when a cop breaks through and rescues us. He had his hands full, at that. First off he was for pinchin' all three of us; but when he found we

hadn't run anybody down, and he's had a smile from Joan and a good look at Fanueil's new grin, he pilots us back to Third Avenue and turns us loose.

"Now listen," says I. "Nix on the keno business. You've overworked the game."

"But I won, you know," chuckles Fanueil. "I must have scored six hundred that time. I say, Joan, I don't know when I've had such a good time before. You're a wonder. Can't you think of something else we can——"

"Back up!" says I. "I ain't goin' to let her start anything new until after I turn her over to her daddy. Besides, it's time to eat."

It's a merry luncheon we had, too, with Joan sayin' funny things in that quiet way of hers, and Fanueil gazin' at her so steady that he almost forgets what's on his plate. And by takin' 'em to the matinée afterwards I manages to kill time until five o'clock without raisin' any more riots. Boiling Bill shows up on the five-fifteen though, and I was sure glad to see him. When I left 'em he was hammerin' Fanueil on the shoulder chummy, so I expect he'd passed favorable on the young gent.

At first I thought I wouldn't say much about my day off when I got home; but that about the keno bunch was too good to keep, so I tells the whole tale.

"How silly!" says Sadie. "Were you in the game, too?"

"Sure I was," says I. "I was keepin' score.

Never again, though. I'm off this zipp-whisker stuff for life. And if Fanueil takes his Joan on a honeymoon trip I'd advise an aëroplane tour at about two thousand feet elevation, where she can start anything she likes."

CHAPTER XVII

WHERE HERM BELONGED TO BE

Blamed if I know how it is I happen to catch so many of 'em. Honest, if my name was Spider Webb instead of Shorty McCabe, or if the Physical Culture Studio was in the basement, with a trap-door from the sidewalk, the crop of strays couldn't be much bigger.

Now, here I am, sittin' quiet and dignified with my heels up on the roll-top, enjoyin' an hour off because one of my reg'lars had canceled a date. I wasn't even readin' the mornin' paper that I had spread out in front of me.

Well, I looks up to see a total stranger dodge through the front office door and close it after him soft and sleuthy. He listens a second, with his ear to the crack, before he lets go of the knob.

When I say he was a total stranger I mean it all, too. Not by any chance could he be someone I'd met before and forgot. Hardly! He has the kind of map you're apt to remember—shifty, narrow-gage eyes; long, thin nose; droopy mustache; and a chin that fades away into a prominent throat apple. It's a combination you don't meet every day. Then there's

the soft black hat with the wide brim, the roll-plated watch-chain looped across the port side of his vest, and the near-cameo charm danglin' from the third buttonhole. Oh, he's a moss-agate, all right.

Not the bashful, retirin' kind, though. After he's stretched his ear once more towards the keyhole, he slouches across the room and favors me with a grin.

"One of these here health studios, eh?" says he, jerkin' his thumb at the sign on the ground glass. "Just thought I'd drop in and take a look around."

"How folksy of you!" says I. "But we don't claim to be in the same class with Grant's Tomb or the Art Museum, you know. So make it snappy."

That little hint don't get to him at all. He proceeds to gawp at the ring trophies and signed photos on the wall; and then, pullin' up a chair, he plants himself easy.

"I reckon you can guess who I am, neighbor," he remarks.

"In a way," says I. "You're the kind we see at Niagara Falls in the summer, and St. Pete., Florida, in the winter; one of the Cousin Butt-in breed."

He seems more disappointed than peeved.

"Oh, come!" says he. "Take a look."

"Thanks," says I, "but I've mislaid my lorgnette. Shoot me the answer before I get nervous."

At that he leans over and whispers husky: "I'm Gundy."

"Are you?" says I. "Which Gundy?"

Which don't make a hit with him, either. He pushes the dusty black felt further back, revealin' a forelock of mud-colored hair, and scowls a trifle annoyed.

"Why, *the* Gundy," says he. "Hiram Gundy, of Maumee, South Carolina."

"Sorry," says I, "but I don't circulate much down in the blind tiger belt. What made you think, Herm, that I ought——"

"Well, you are slow, you New York folks," he breaks in. "Don't know what's goin' on right in your own town. Here! Lemme show you." With that he reaches for the mornin' paper and turns to the front page. "There! That's me."

"Oh!" says I, readin' the head-line. "'Gundy Will Tell All.' Oh, yes!"

Course, I don't pretend to keep track of half these bunk jobs they put over on the government. And this special one—something about a big water-power graft that had been slipped through with the pork bill—hadn't got me any more excited than the others. I knew, in a general way, that a senator and a Cabinet officer was said to be mixed up in it, along with some of our Wall Street bunch.

Generally, too, along with the big names that come up, there are one or two unknowns thrown sudden into the spotlight, and for a few days

they're reg'lar head-liners. Near as I could make out something like that had happened to this Gundy person.

"'Gundy Will Tell All,'" I repeats. "Well, will you?"

"Maybe," says he, waggin' his head; "maybe not. It depends."

Say, it don't take much to amuse me when I've got spare time on my hands. I gives Gundy the droop-eyed size-up. You can see the Main Street Smart Aleck stickin' out from every angle of him.

"I expect you're some guy—down in Maumee?" says I.

"How about here, too?" he asks.

I hunches my shoulders.

"New York's quite a big burg, you know," says I.

"Not so derned big it can fool with Herm Gundy," says he. "I reckon I've made it sit up and take notice already. And I ain't through yet, not by a dumbed sight. I know a few things, I do."

"Think of that!" says I. "It's a wonder they let you run around loose."

Gundy indulges in a throaty cackle.

"They don't," says he. "That's why I ducked in here: to give 'em the slip. See?"

"No," says I. "I don't quite get you. Give who the slip, for instance?"

"Secret Service men and private detectives," says he. "There's a pair of each. But

say, I got good and tired of bein' cooped up in that gosh-dinged hotel, with nobody to talk to but fool lawyers. So I took a sneak out a side door. Thought I'd made a clean getaway, too, until just as I got along here, when I had an idea I could see one of 'em trailin' behind me. That's when I dodged into your stairway. I reckon that threw 'em off, eh?"

"We'll hope so," says I. "I ain't anxious to get mixed up in anything. You're a witness to something or other, I take it?"

"I should say I was," says he. "I'm *the* witness. Why, the whole government case is built up on what I can tell. Wa'n't the deal put through right in the sample room of our hotel?"

"Oh!" says I. "You're a landlord, are you?"

"Well," says he draggy, "not exactly. Amounts to the same thing, though. For what old man Hovey knows about runnin' a hotel ain't much. It's me that 'tends to 'most everything, from keepin' the cook good-humored to meetin' guests at the Junction and drivin' 'em down."

"Must be quite a joint if you had all that swell push down there?"

"We can take care of fifteen or twenty when we're pushed," says he. "I been at old Hovey to build on a wing and put in a couple more bath-rooms—reg'lar ones with white porcelain tubs in 'em. But not him. He won't even get

me any new ice-water pitchers, nor paint the front veranda. All he wants to do is sit around and swap yarns with drummers. Lazy! You wouldn't believe."

"Yes, I would, Herm," says I. "I've put up at places just like the Hovey House—dozens of 'em. It's catty-cornered across from the general store, with a fine view of the hitchin'-rail and the hay-scales. There's about five porch rockers out front, some with the bottoms gone and all of 'em with the arms well whittled up. Inside there's a rusty Franklin wood-stove in the middle of the office, and for wall decorations there's a collection of fire-insurance calendars, some datin' back to 1903. And I'll bet the ice-water cooler in the corner ain't been scoured out since the pink roses painted on the front was new. Has it, now?"

Herm shakes his head.

"You got it about right," says he. "We don't put on many frills at the Hovey House."

"And you mean to say," I goes on, "that you had a lot of big guns—senators and so on—stoppin' there? Ah, back up!"

"I didn't claim we had the whole United States Senate," says Gundy. "But we had one senator, all right. We've had him before. Comes down for the quail-shootin'. And say, we got the best bird country in the State. Maybe that's what this Mr. Stillmore and Mr. Lamson came for, too. Maybe!" And Herm drops his left eyelid.

"Stillmore!" says I, prickin' up my ears. "Not old H. R. himself?"

"That's the very one," says Herm. "He didn't put it on the register, but them was the initials on his bag—H. R. S.—and I heard the senator call him by name. Didn't he do some cussin' about the mattress in his room, though! One night on that was enough for him, he says. That's how I happened to be sittin' up until all hours, so I could drive him back to the Junction to catch No. 37, that goes through at one-fifteen. And some close session them three had in the sample room that night, I'm tellin' you."

"Huh!" says I. "Come now, Herm, didn't they talk it over out in the office right in front of you? Or maybe ask you to join in?"

"No, they didn't," growls Gundy, turnin' sulky. "But, just the same— Well, I know what I know. What's more, they suspicioned I do, too. If they didn't, why should they be tryin' to pump it out of me?"

"Have they?" I asks. "Who, Stillmore?"

"That slick young feller came from him, I'll bet," says Gundy. "Who else in New York would be so anxious to show me the sights, take me to the the-ayter, and put me up at that swell hotel? I've been lettin' him, too. All them Secret Service men did, after I wrote on to Washington hintin' what I could tell, was to send me a summons and forty dollars expense money. But this young Mr. Palmer acted dif-

ferent. He knew how to do it right. Why, say, I been ridin' in these here taxicabs, and eatin' fancy dinners, and goin' to musical shows and cabbyrets for near a week. Never cost me a red, either. And talk about free cigars—Look at them!" At which Gundy displays his bulgin' vest pockets.

"And if I was a heavy drinker," he goes on, "I could have anything they got at the bar any time I want it. But I got to keep my head straight, with such a lot dependin' on me while I'm up here. I got to think of the gov'nment, ain't I?"

"Herm," says I, "if you're a federal witness, how is it you're chasin' round with scouts from the other side? Is that playin' it square with Uncle Sam?"

"How should I know who this young Palmer is from?" protests Gundy. "He ain't said, and I ain't asked. And if he wants me to go inspect some mines or something down in South America—well, why shouldn't I?"

With that he tips me another of them cagey winks, and proceeds to bite the end off a twenty-five-cent Havana.

"So it was you sent out the tip on them three gettin' together down there, was it?" I asks. "How'd you happen to think of doin' that?"

"Well," says he, "I'll tell you. It's because I had my eyes and ears open. I've been readin' the papers ever since I was a kid—readin' 'em

close, and thinkin'. And it struck me that gettin' into the papers was what counted. I got to figurin' how I could break in.

"But it wa'n't until Congress begun to talk up this investigation that I saw my chance to land. Took 'em just three weeks after they got my letter before they got busy. I reckon they was lookin' up the facts. But when they found I knew what I was talkin' about——

"Well, here I am. I've broke in, ain't I? Say, I've had my picture printed more'n a dozen times; I've been followed by reporters all over town; and I'm livin' high. That's gettin' there, ain't it?"

"Ye-e-es," says I, "if that's what you want."

"It is—just," says he. "Nobody at home thought I could do it. Why, say, ten days ago I amounted to about as much in Maumee as a ham sandwich at a fried chicken dinner. Maybe people would nod to me, maybe they wouldn't. What do I care for 'em now, though? I've made my name known from one end of the country to the other. I've got Congress waitin' on what I'm goin' to say next. I've stirred up New York and got some of your big men squirmin' restless. They're losin' sleep nights askin' themselves, how much does Herm Gundy know, anyway? Ain't that so?"

I couldn't deny it.

"Between you and me, Herm," says I, "what did you hear that evenin'?"

Gundy, he glances around cautious. Then he leans back and chuckles.

"That's the big joke," says he. "Not a blamed thing."

"Eh?" says I. "You mean——"

"I was sound asleep on two chairs out in the office," he goes on. "Why should I be rubberin'? I didn't know who Stillmore was at the time, or anything about this water-power graft. I supposed they was playin' poker in there. But say, they don't know that. I got 'em buffaloed all right, too. That trip to South America ain't all I'm goin' to pull out of this. Before I get through I mean to strike 'em for— Say! What was that?"

I'd heard it, too. Sort of a scrapin' sound from outside the air-shaft window just beyond the desk. And a shufflin' out in the hallway behind Herm. I signals to him to slip over to the door, while I jumps to the window and runs up the sash.

It's no false alarm. Here's a couple of well dressed gents crouchin' out on the fire-escape.

"Hey, you!" I calls out. "This way out. Ah, yes, you will, or I'll let loose the extinguisher on you. That's right: Come in and be sociable."

I expect they didn't like the looks of that copper tank I'd grabbed off the hook. Anyway, in they climbs.

Meanwhile Gundy has hailed another pair that he's found in the hallway, and in a minute

we has the quartet facin' each other. Herm seems to know 'em all, by sight anyway, for he nods to three of 'em; and to the other—one of the pair on the fire-escape—he says jaunty:

"Hello, Palmer. That you?"

"Well, gents," says I, "is this a surprise party, or what? And why all the sleuthy motions?"

The pair from the hallway exchanges glances, and then one of 'em speaks up.

"You may have him, Palmer," says he. "Send him to the South Pole if you like."

And with that they makes a quick exit.

Young Mr. Palmer stands starin' at Gundy, gettin' pinker and pinker under the eyes. Finally he breaks out with:

"I say, Gundy, we have no further use for you. Get back to South Carolina the best way you can."

He's real waspy about it, too. But Herm Gundy ain't to be crushed that way. What chin he has he's holdin' up off his collar.

"Oh, that's the way you feel about it, is it?" says he. "Came rubberin' around, and got an earful, didn't you? And now you're goin' to kick me out. Say, lemme tell you a few things first. I'm as ready to go as you are to have me. I've seen enough of your town to last a life-time. I put one over on you. Had you scared stiff. That's enough for me. If you think I want to stay on much longer in this messy, noisy mob of foreigners, you're mis-

taken. Maumee for me, every time. But say, Mr. Palmer, I ain't goin' to walk."

"What do you mean?" demands Palmer.

"I can still tell the newspaper boys about that South American trip."

Mr. Palmer shrugs his shoulders.

"How much?" he asks.

"Oh, a hundred ought to do it, I reckon," says Herm careless.

And Palmer, after countin' out five twenties, turns on his heel. Gundy gathers the yellow-backs from the floor where the young man has tossed 'em peevish.

"Oh, well!" says he, with a chuckle. "It didn't last long, but I broke in."

"And now," says I, "it's back to Maumee for good, eh?"

"Uh-huh," says Herm. "I reckon that's where I belong to be."

CHAPTER XVIII

LITTLE SULLY'S DOUBLE PLAY

Say, this is on the side. You might suppose that, with two youngsters callin' me pop, and one goin' on ten years old, I'd be more or less wise to the art of raisin' 'em. Ought to be, anyway, hadn't I? And I expect at times I do make a noise like I am. But right now, while I got my chin dropped, I want to admit that the longer I keep at it the less I seem to know about bein' a parent.

Last Saturday afternoon was a fair sample of how I'm apt to crab the act. First off, I wasn't countin' on bein' called to stand the stern father test, so I was caught kind of off my guard, if that's any alibi.

I'd closed the Physical Culture Studio at noon, sent Swifty Joe home rejoicin' to his South Brooklyn truck patch, and had hurried out to Rockhurst myself, the big idea being to help Dominick in a little repair job on the sea-wall. I'd got myself into a pair of overalls, and we had a tub of cement all mixed, when Sadie appears on the back veranda and begins wavin' distress signals. Course, I has to quit and go see what's broke loose.

"Well, what's gone wrong?" says I, climbin'

up the walk as far as the corner of the garage. "Subs in the offing?"

"No," says she; "but I wish you would just come in here a moment, Shorty."

I knew the tone, and it ain't often Sadie gets that desperate note in her voice. So I trails along in.

"Bring him down here, Aunt Julia," she calls up the stairs.

Not a reg'lar aunt, you know, only a cousin-in-law of Sadie's on the Dipworthy side. She's been stayin' with us since Easter, and it's by request that the children call her Aunt Julia.

Understand, I don't mind havin' Julia around—not a bit. I always have been kind of strong for old maids. I admire their pluck, for one thing, and generally they have a lot of good points. Besides, Aunt Julia adds sort of a tone to the establishment. Quite a highbrow, for one thing. Oh, my, yes! Reads things in French and Spanish, calls these music composers by their right names without chokin', and can talk about such stuff as the Bahia movement, Bernard Shaw, and the free-verse slingers until you're dizzy.

Kind of distinguished-lookin', too, when she's dolled up for a dinner-party, though I must say these smock effects she wears around the house day-times look kind of sloppy to me. Also the stringy way she does her hair.

Ideas are Aunt Julia's long suit, though. She has 'em about 'most everything, and of

course the proper way of bringin' up children is among 'em. So it's only natural that she's been givin' us a few points. Did you ever see an old maid who couldn't? But, on the other hand, who are we to say we don't need 'em?

Oh, she does it pleasant enough. Nothing naggy about Aunt Julia. Just has her notions about things, and the facts to back 'em up. So when this serial debate about little Sully's dancin' lessons breaks out again, and she's listened to the youngster announce that he's off that silly stuff for good, and Sadie has sighed weary and put it up to me, and I've passed out my usual wabbly decision—well, then Aunt Julia states her mind.

"Of course," says she, "if you think the child capable of deciding such matters for himself, there's nothing more to be said. If not, you should insist firmly that he must do as you think best."

"How about this dancin' business, though?" I puts in. "We ain't trainin' him up for any Palm Room lizard or cabaret scorpion, you know."

Aunt Julia smiles sarcastic.

"I hardly think you need fear that he will ever become a professional dancer," says she. "But, to my mind, dancing is precisely what he needs now. It gives one poise; it lends grace. And an hour once a week among little girls of his own age will do him good. It may teach him that the female of the species is not neces-

sarily a fearsome, mysterious creature—may tone down some of his rough exuberance."

"Then you would insist on his going?" asks Sadie.

"Undoubtedly," says Aunt Julia.

"There!" says Sadie. "Just what I've always told you, Shorty. Now, I want you to see that he goes."

"All right," says I. "If the ayes have it, it's a vote. And maybe it's the best thing for him, after all."

So, only the night before, I'd given Sully his orders.

"But, pop—" he begins, his upper lip startin' to quiver.

"Now, none of that, son," says I. "You can't work me with the sob stuff. Your mother wants you to go to that dancin' class to-morrow afternoon, and that's all there is to it. Those girls ain't goin' to bite you, are they? You take a chance, anyway."

He had his head turned to the wall as I said good night, so I can't tell whether he's takin' it cheerful or is indulgin' in the sulks. One thing I'm fairly sure of, though. Whatever I hand out straight to the youngster generally goes with him. Mostly I get along without havin' to lay the law down flat. I try to, mainly because I ain't always sure what it ought to be myself. But when he's told what to do or what not to do, and can't argue me out of it, then you can depend on his mindin'.

Which is why I'm a little puzzled when I find that it's Sully who's causin' the domestic crisis.

Aunt Julia comes towin' him down from upstairs like she was leadin' a prisoner up before the bar.

"This is the way he dresses for a dancing lesson," says she. "Look!"

At first glance I couldn't see anything wrong. I'll bet he would have put it over me easy; for he has on his dinky little black coat, his wide white collar, black silk stockings, patent-leather pumps, and everything.

"Well?" says I, inquirin'.

"Doesn't it strike you that he looks unusually —er—plump?" suggests Julia.

"Eh?" says I, givin' him the sharp up-and-down. "Why, that's so. Wha—what——"

"Here!" says Sadie, unloosenin' a few buttons in the front of his white shirt. "This is the way he minds you. See!"

What she reveals underneath is a gray flannel shirt with red letters on it. And under the silk stockings are gray woolen ones. In fact, Sully has dressed twice—once for dancin', once for baseball; and as he couldn't do both at the same time, it was up to us to guess which pastime he meant to begin on.

"Huh!" says I, starin' at him stern. "Reg'lar human layer cake. Spillin' a little strategy, eh?"

He don't deny it, nor he don't whimper. I expect, if he'd been trained proper, he ought

to be scared stiff in a case like this where he was caught with the goods on, as you might say. But all he does is look me square in the eye spunky, like he was watchin' to see what I was goin' to do next. And, somehow, I'm just soft enough to like to have him that way. I hope he'll never be afraid of me, or anyone else. Still, I don't mean to let him get away with any mutiny act.

"Young man," says I, "you just trot upstairs and shed them baseball togs. Make it speedy, too."

This time he behaves like he was ready to obey orders, for in less than five minutes he reports back for inspection, all costumed proper for minglin' with the younger set. It seems the class meets at the Boomer-Days', and the usual program has been to send Sully over in the car; that is, when he could be induced to go.

"Perhaps I had better go along and see that he really gets there," suggests Aunt Julia.

"And be sure that he actually goes in, will you?" adds Sadie.

"I shall take him to the door myself," says Julia, settin' her chin firm.

I thought they was carryin' the deputy sheriff effect a bit too far myself, but I let 'em do it their own way. And Sully, after givin' Aunt Julia one scowl, follows her into the limousine.

"Now," says I, "if the revolutions are all over, maybe I can get back to my work."

Seems like it was goin' to be a poor day for repairin' sea-walls, though. Dominick and I'd hardly got half a dozen rocks laid up when Sadie calls me in again. And now she has her chin set, too.

"What do you think, Shorty?" says she. "He isn't at the dancing class, after all."

"How do you know?" says I.

Well, seems she'd got kind of anxious for fear Sully would still be grouchy and might take it out by rough-housin' some of his little play-mates, so she'd called up to see how he was behavin'. Mrs. Boomer-Day reports that he's missin'. Yes, she'd seen him arrive, had even watched the maid tow him upstairs to the dressin'-room. But after that he hadn't shown up. He'd just disappeared. They'd searched the house for him, too.

And you should of seen Aunt Julia's face when she blows in about then and gets the news.

"Why," says she, "I took him to the very door. I don't understand."

"I don't know what to make of it," says Sadie, "except that he is defying us."

"Looks that way, don't it?" says I.

"Well?" says she. "We can't let him do that, can we?"

"It depends," says I, "on who's who around this ranch. It it's Sully we may as well find out, and I'm going to devote the rest of the day to the job."

I'll admit I was some peeved; but I was a bit curious, too. My first hunch was that he was still hidin' at the Boomer-Days'. In ten minutes I'd changed my clothes, jumped into the runabout, and was over there. But after half an hour of peekin' into closets and under beds and into clothes-hampers and coal-bins, I had to give it up.

"Evidently," says Mrs. Boomer-Day, in that purry, disagreeable way of hers, "Master Sullivan prefers other society. My Harold thinks that he is probably off playing baseball somewhere.

"Your Harold may be a good guesser," says I.

I was red behind the ears, I expect, as I backs out; but I decides to follow the clew just the same. So I drives down to the village, and hunts up a couple of half-grown boys that are hangin' around the garage.

"Say, son," I asks one of 'em, "who are the Rockhurst Cubs playin' to-day?"

"The East Siders," says he. "Over'n th' field back of th' nut-and-bolt fact'ry."

"Thanks," says I, speedin' up once more.

As a rule, I don't follow these games of the back-lot league in person, although I get full reports of most of the Saturday events. Sully does the reportin'. He belongs to the Cubs himself, bein' sort of third assistant substitute, near as I can make out. I've been promisin' all the season to go and watch one of these

mighty contests; but, somehow, I haven't got around to it.

But now I made straight for the scene of conflict. I had a notion I might not be such a welcome spectator, either. Not that I'd settled on anything definite, but I was gradually gettin' worked up to the point where I might do something abrupt.

No trouble to locate that ball game. You could hear it half a mile off. From the sound you might have thought that about a thousand strikers was bein' charged by a troop of cowboy cavalry. But when I got near enough to see over the fence, all I can make out is about three or four dozen kids, rangin' from nine to fourteen.

I parks the car outside, and strolls in until I can camp down behind an agitated little bunch just to the left of home plate. Nobody pays any attention to me at all. I might have been a striped elephant hung with silver bells and not been noticed, for they sure was considerably taken up with the doin's out there in front. Mostly they was yellin', players as well as spectators, and of course nobody could hear what anyone else had to say. But that didn't seem to bother 'em a bit. Each one kept right on. And it's surprisin', ain't it, how much lung power a peaked-faced, seventy-pound kid can develop when he really cuts loose?

As the ones dancin' around the bases and out in the field have on dirty gray suits, I take it

that the Cubs are lettin' the East Siders have their turn at the bat. Reg'lar uniforms, the Cubs have. I remember donatin' a ten-spot to that noble purpose along last March. The East Siders don't seem to be costumed so consistent, for the one prancin' on and off first base has on a faded blue shirt with khaki pants, while the husky youngster swingin' a club so menacin' at the plate is sportin' a hornet-striped sweater and plaid knickers that need repairin' in the seat.

But the copper-haired boy who's crouchin' tigerish in the pitcher's box, with one eye on second and the other on the batter, is got up about as odd for this particular brand of sport as any I ever remember seein' on a diamond. He's wearin' a pleated white shirt, black knickerbockers, black silk stockings, and patent-leather pumps. Also, there's something familiar about that freckled face and the snub nose. You've guessed it. Sully!

I expect a reg'lar parent, one that was on to his job, would have marched right out there, taken him by the ear, and led him back to his dancin' class without hesitatin' a second. I knew that's what I ought to do. But, somehow, I couldn't. Not right in the middle of an innin'. You see, I used to do a little pitchin' myself. Anyway, it wouldn't be so conspicuous if I waited until the sides changed.

"How does the game stand?" I asks of a lad just in front of me. He has been beggin' a

party he calls "Scrubby" to "Take a lead, for the love of Mike!" and has subsided for a second. That is, I tries to ask him, but he don't hear me until I've swung him around by the elbow and shouted in his ear.

"Aw, we had 'em smeared—'leven to five," says he, "at the end of the third, and we was goin' strong until they sprung this bench-warmer on us. Then they begun gettin' the good breaks, th' lucky stiffs. Aw, Scrubby, git off that sack, can't you! Git off it!"

Which Scrubby does, but he's no more'n started for third than Sully stops a windup in the middle and slugs the ball to second. It's a low throw and a bit wild, but short-stop picks it out of the dust and manages to block off the runner as he dashes panicky back to the base.

"He's out! No, he ain't! Yes, he is, too! The ump says he is! Aw, robber, robber!"

Well, the howls go something like that. You know. But after everyone has had his say, or lost his breath tryin', the decision seems to stand, and Scrubby comes limpin' in.

"Wouldn't that frost you!" remarks my young friend. "He's got a head like a pin, Scrubby has. Two down, that makes, and this boob of a Chunk Meyers up. Aw, say! Them Cubs'll be tyin' th' score first thing we know. It's only 'leven-eight now and three innin's to go."

"Lost your battin' streak, eh?" I suggests.

"Nah," says he. "We was scorin' right

along until they puts in that Sully McCabe. We ain't found him yet, that's all. You wait. We'll pound him all over the lot."

"Not much of a pitcher, Sully, eh?" I asks.

"Oh, he's all right," says the youngster. "He's got a fast in, he has. Now, watch this one. No, it broke too quick. But look at Chunk reach for it. Ah, wait for the good ones, Chunk. Make him put 'em over. Yep, he's some twirler. Looked like he wa'n't goin' to show up at first, and then he breezes on in them fancy togs. Been to a girls' party, I expect. His folks make him do things like that, they say. What do you know about that? I wisht they'd kept him away about an hour longer. Aw, for the love of beans! Chunk has fanned!"

Chunk had, makin' three out. And once more I knew it was up to me to lead Sully from the field and tell him a few things.

"Come on, now, fellers! Buck up. We gotta get them three runs this innin'."

It's Sully, tellin' his side a few things as he leaves the mound. And while he's walkin' in I steps around back of an old sprinklin'-cart that the street cleanin' department seems to have run in there for outdoor storage. Even if I hadn't ducked I doubt if he'd seen me, for he's got his whole mind on that game. Once, as he walks over to sort out a bat, he was within ten feet of me, but he never looks up. So when it's his turn at the plate I comes out in the open

again, watchin' curious to see what the youngster would do with the hickory.

His first move is to spit on his palms, rub 'em in the dirt, and then wipe 'em careful on them best Sunday knickers. No, he don't follow that up by knockin' the cover off the ball, exactly; but after passin' a couple of wide ones he swings vicious and sends a snappy grounder through short-stop, and by the time the left fielder has run in on it Sully is well on his way to first.

He had the throw beat a mile, but he's takin' no chances, and I can't say I was quite so thrilled as some of the others when he executes a ten-foot slide into the bag. He's safe, all right, and the Cub on third manages to score on the catcher's muff, but the appearance of that dancin' class costume ain't a whole lot improved.

But then a minute later, when the East Siders' center fielder fumbles a pop fly, and follows it up with a wild throw to first, I finds myself swingin' my hat and joinin' in with the chorus of "Beat it, Sully! Go to third! Keep a-goin'!"

And Sully does. A knee of one of the silk stockin's failed to stand the strain as he stumbles across home plate, and he's left most of a shirt sleeve in the third baseman's hands, but the score stands: East Siders 11—Rockhurst Cubs 10, and only one down. By the way Sully's nine gathers round and pounds him on

the back and offers him water and chewin' gum, I judge that they approve of his base-runnin'.

I expect I could tell you every play made from then on, but maybe I'd better skip to the last half of the ninth, when, with fifteen tallies up for the Cubs and only fourteen for the opposition, two out and two on bases, Sully digs his right toe into the black dirt of the hole that marks the pitcher's box and faces Tony Sarello, the East Siders' heaviest slugger, who'd rapped out a two-bagger off him only a couple of innin's before.

Believe me, it's some strenuous moment. Noise! Why, a double-header crowd at the Polo Grounds couldn't yell much louder or more constant. I was lookin' for the youngster to crack any minute. But say, in the midst of all that riot he stands as steady as a bridge-pier, glancin' from first to second, shakin' his head at the catcher to change the signal, and gettin' Tony fidgety while he fingers the ball. Tony whales away at one, but it sails off outside the foul line. Then he bites at a slow drop, and before's he's recovered from that Sully shoots over a fast straight one shoulder-high that Tony fans furious, and the trick is turned. He's churned the air for a strike-out, and the Cubs have won.

Some head work that was, take it from me. So why shouldn't I lead the cheerin'? I'm still swingin' my hat and yellin' enthusiastic when

Sully walks in from the box, and the first thing I know he's starin' at me bug-eyed.

"Pop!" says he, sort of gaspy.

"Good boy, Sully!" says I, pattin' him on the back. "You had his number, all right. Christy Mathewson couldn't have done better."

He grins, looks kind of relieved, and asks: "Did—did you see much of the game?"

"Only the last three innin's," says I. "But it was a swell finish. And say, son, I guess it's worth celebratin'. Collect your team and we'll see if we can't load 'em all on the runabout. I think there's a freezer of ice-cream at home that ain't workin', and maybe some cake.

Course, that was all dead wrong. No parent should get so excited over a ball game that he plumb forgets why he went there. I'll admit that. But blamed if that ain't my case. And not until we rolls into the yard, with the members of the Rockhurst Cubs plastered all over that car like flies on a lump of sugar, and I gets a glimpse of Sadie and Aunt Julia starin' out at us horrified, do I have a rush of memory to the brain.

"Good night!" says I under my breath.

"Why, Shorty McCabe!" says Sadie. "I thought you went to find Sully and take him back to his dancing class?"

"Why—er—that's so," says I, grinnin' sheepish. "But say, Sadie, you just ought to see that kid play ball."

"Humph!" says Sadie.

But here was nine hungry youngsters, all eyin' her amiable and expectant, and she's just as strong for kids as I am. So she suspends hostilities long enough to carry out the ice-cream and cake program. Not until they've cleaned up our dinner dessert and been sent off cheerin', does she range me and Sully up in the livin'-room and begin makin' pointed remarks.

"Sully, you're a sight," says she. "And you stood by, Shorty, and watched him ruin a perfectly good suit of clothes! Why didn't you bring him home at once?"

"With him coaxin' a run out of a scratch hit like a reg'lar Ty Cobb? Ah, come, Sadie!" says I.

"What I fail to understand," puts in Aunt Julia, "is his disappearance from the Boomer-Days'. Didn't I watch you go in the front door, Sully?"

Sully nods.

"And then the maid took you upstairs?"

"Uh-huh," says Sully.

"And then?" demands Julia.

Sully glances at her weary, like it was no use wastin' breath tryin' to make her understand. He turns to me.

"You wouldn't listen, pop, when I wanted to tell you how the Cubs was to give me a try-out to-day against the East Siders. I been practicin' up for a month. And then yesterday our reg'lar twirler, Pink Slattery, goes and gets a

boil on his shoulder. Could I lay down on the fellers in a case like that? Now, could I?"

"I expect you couldn't," says I. "But that don't explain what you did after goin' up the front stairs at the Boomer-Days'."

"Why," says Sully, "I walked down the back way."

Well, that ends the court martial, and I hope I kept in my chuckles until after Sully had been sent to clean up.

"But, Shorty," says Sadie. "I don't see what we're going to do."

"Simple enough," says I. "Next Saturday see that he wears his baseball outfit on the outside."

"What about his dancing lessons, though?" insists Sadie.

"Suppose we ditch 'em until late next fall?" says I. "Do you know, Sadie, that kid may have big-league stuff in him."

I hears a gasp from Aunt Julia. But Sadie, she just smiles sort of indulgent. Anyway, there's a vacancy in the Boomer-Day dancin' class, and I understand that Pink Slattery has been notified he can take his time about curin' up that boil.

CHAPTER XIX

A RINGER FROM BEDELIA

It didn't promise to be a dull summer, at that. But when the Merritys blew in from Bedelia, Colorado, leased the Mott place for the season, and sprung their plans about Jean on us—well, it did speed things up a bit, even with the war and all.

"I think it's perfectly absurd of them, Shorty," says Sadie.

"Yes; they're that kind, bless 'em!" says I, chucklin' easy.

Maybe you don't remember my mentionin' the Merritys before. I don't wonder. It was a long time back, the first year I ran the Physical Culture Studio, and that's almost gettin' into ancient hist'ry, ain't it? Anyway, it seems so to me.

But my meetin' up with Hank and Reney dated further back than that, to the old ring days when I had a trainin' camp just out of Bedelia and not far from Merrity's ranch. We got to be quite chummy that summer, me and Hank, what with havin' our pictures printed together on the sportin' pages and Hank winnin' a nice little wad on me when the match come off.

Then there was that time, a few years later,

when they showed up in New York, after Hank's grub-stake interest in the Jayhawker mine had turned out such a winner; and, instead of findin' him wearin' a leather-trimmed hat and his pants tucked into his boot-tops, I discovers that he's had himself tailored like a collar ad. youth and was takin' a course at a skinologist's. Also, Reney had been up against the beauty doctors until you could hardly tell her from a movie star, and she could look at you through a gold lorgnette as calm as if she'd never juggled crockery behind a railroad lunch-counter.

But after a couple of months in Peacock Alley they suddenly quit the game. They'd made the grade all right, and as far as looks went they was the real thing. But they was lonesome.

"Never again!" Hank had told me, then. Yet here he is once more, with a new crop of freckles, his carroty hair a little thin in front, and his belt let out a few notches. He's raised another set of blond lip-whiskers, and has gone back to wearin' one of them biscuit-colored felt hats with a high crown and a six-inch brim. So there's no mistakin' him for anything but an alfalfa delegate.

And Reney she's given up the struggle to keep under a hundred and eighty, or have her hair done like Mrs. Vernon Castle's. Substantial and motherly, Mrs. Merrity looks, with no frills about her whatever. So I'm a little

puzzled at this splurge of theirs in takin' a house down on the Point among a lot of swells.

"I thought you'd gone back to the simple life for good," says I. "You're goin' to find it quite a change from Bedelia, you know."

"Oh, yes—some," says Hank. "But then, Bedelia's a lot different from what it was when you were out there, Shorty."

"Don't tell me you got a bank and a trolley line," says I.

"Hank's president of both," puts in Mrs. Merrity. "He's had a term in Congress too, and could have——"

"Now, Reney!" protests Hank. "Let's stick to public improvements. What do you think has become of the old ranch, Shorty?"

"Turned it into a truck garden?"

They smiles at each other.

"It's Ward Five," says Hank, "and has fourteen miles of paved streets. Course, we don't live there any longer. We bought the Judge Bickens house, on Colorado Avenue."

"But we had it all done over," adds Reney, "and put on the sun-room and pergolas, and built the double garage, and laid out our Italian garden. Hank, you must show him those pictures. We think it quite a nice place—for Bedelia."

"Listens like it might be Newport," says I. "What I don't get, though, is why you should leave all that, and your good friends and all your interestin' enemies, and come on East

again, to camp down among as frosty a set of near-plutes as you could find anywhere along the Sound. You ain't never meanin' to take another crack at the social game, are you?"

"Not us," says Hank prompt. "Do we look that simple?"

"Then what's the big idea?" I insists.

"It's for Jean," says Mrs. Merrity, sighin' a bit. "You know, she is almost twenty-five now."

"Oh!" says I.

Course, I hadn't seen Jean then; but that smothered sigh and the item about her age told the whole story.

"What's the matter with the local Romeos out there?" says I.

"Gosh!" groans Hank. "There was candidates enough; only none of 'em seemed to last long."

"Somehow," says Mrs. Merrity, "they seemed afraid of Jean."

I got the picture. She'd been sent East to a flossy boardin' school, I remember hearin', when ma and pa was makin' their big splurge here. And the fact that she comes from Bedelia don't throw me off at all. I'd known of cases like that before—young lady highbrows bloomin' in little tank stations where young gents of the first fam'lies still had their hair cut round in the back and the general idea was that a demi-tasse was some kind of a mixed drink.

You know how it is out in the mail-order zone. You can have two banks, and maybe a branch bucket-shop, and a Bohemian grill in the basement of the Plaza Hotel, and still fail to qualify with a dame fresh from University Heights or Copley Square—specially when she turns the veranda chat towards those clever things of Lord Dunsany's, or asks what you think of Amy Lowell.

Yes, I could see 'em shyin' off after the first call or so, and then huntin' up some congenial young thing who'd quit botherin' her intellect about the third year of high school, but had learned how to wear her hair over her ears and could tickle the ukelele something grand.

Still, if the Merritys couldn't see that for themselves, who was I, to advise a strange young lady to ditch the deep stuff? I thought I might hint as much later on, if I saw it was goin' to do any good. But now I only shakes my head.

"With most of the young college hicks off trainin' to be colonels and major-generals," says I, "it's apt to be a poor season for mid-summer romances."

"I'm afraid you don't understand what we mean about Jean," says Mrs. Merrity.

Course, bein' so sure I did, I smiles and lets it go at that. And then, a couple of days later, I met Jean. She hadn't any more'n given me the up-and-down in that calm, steady way of hers than I saw my dope-sheet was about as

accurate as a left-handed drawin' of a pig made blindfolded.

"Hello, Professor!" says she, steppin' up brisk and givin' me a five-fingered grip. "I've heard a lot about you."

Talk about your lady husks! Why, say, this Jean person looked like she might be as well muscled as any trapeze performer you ever saw do the giant swing. You know, Hank is quite sizable, specially across the shoulders; and Mrs. Merrity in her younger days was considerable of a wild rose. Well, Jean takes after 'em both, in a way. She's big without bein' awkward; and, while she has her mother's dark hair and eyes, she has sort of a heavy face, like Hank's. So she ain't a handsome girl, by any means; but, at the same time, she's kind of stunnin'.

That don't begin to describe Jean, though; for she's about the oddest combination I ever ran across. Don't get the idea she's just one of the cow-girl type. Nothing as crude as that. As we found out afterward, she could sit in at a dinner-party without usin' the wrong forks, and could carry her end of the table chat with the best of 'em. She danced, could take a hand at bridge, or would sit around listenin' to polite gossip.

Yet there was something odd about this whaling big girl who moved around so restless and had so little to say. It wasn't that she was just bored. Seemed to be deeper than that: some-

thing she was choking down, keeping back. I'd noticed it most when she was sizin' up people, specially the Watrouses.

They're our real head-liners, you know, when it comes to countin' old fam'ly jewels and country estates and coats-of-arms. Course, Mrs. Theobald Chandler Watrous only married into all this; but she was long on the ancestor stuff herself, so I understand. And as for Miss Cornelia, why, she goes 'way back to the days when the Stuyvesants were newcomers.

They look enough alike to be sisters, with their long, straight noses, thin lips, and pointed chins; and, believe me, when they sweep into a room majestic they're some pair to draw to. Me, I dive for the discards about then; for, although we've been neighbors quite some years now, and they've been here on and off to see Sadie, I don't suppose I've ever been officially recognized, or ever will be.

They're too busy, for one thing, runnin' the church and regulatin' society. They take both jobs mighty serious, too. I expect Sadie had to pull some wires before she got 'em to notice that Jean existed. I understand Jean had to be exhibited on neutral ground and looked over thorough before she could even be introduced to 'em. As for Hank and Mrs. Merrity, they wasn't so much as mentioned. But that was all right. They didn't want to be.

"You see," explains Mrs. Merrity, "she thinks even Bedelia is too artificial, too civi-

lized. But of course we have only the imitation. If she could know the real thing once, without waiting as long as I did, she might like it better. And perhaps—oh, who knows!"

Business of maternal pipe-dreams by Reney. I had to smile. What the tests was I didn't hear, but Jean passed. The Watrouses fixed a day and place where they'd meet her at a tea, and after that she could be admitted anywhere almost as free as if she wore a fire badge.

Whether she was wise to all this or not, I can't say. Sadie insists that she didn't tell her a word. But it was weird to see Jean size up the Watrouses when she thought nobody was lookin'. Almost creepy. Honest! And yet, as a matter of fact, they seemed to take quite a fancy to her. Anyway, Sadie was almost chesty over the notice they took of her candidate.

"Just think, Shorty!" says she. "They've asked Jean for luncheon. She will meet Courtney."

"Then tell her to take along some crochet work," says I, "so she can have a real sociable time with him."

"Now, Shorty!" protests Sadie. "I wouldn't be so mean."

Maybe Courtney don't do crochetin', but he looks it. He's 'most as tall and slim and sallow as his mother, and just as ladylike. Course, he was sickly as a boy, and always had nurses and tutors around, which may account for his

Lizzie ways. Then, bein' brought up by them two women, with no man around,—Mrs. Watrous bein' a widow,—no wonder he wears a wrist-watch and takes his most violent exercise when he's playin' the violin.

If Jean had looked slant-eyed at the ladies Watrous, what would she do when she saw Courtney? Or what would happen to them slim fingers of his after Jean had given him one of her Rocky Mountain grips? If the young hicks out in Bedelia was leery of her, I could see where Courtney would take one glance and dive behind a sofa.

Takes me to frame 'em up, eh? The Merritys would tow Jean around a few years more, with her gettin' huskier and huskier and the men growin' shyer and shyer, until Hank and Reney would finally give up all hope of ever marryin' her off, and she'd go back to Colorado and settle down to runnin' a mine or get herself elected to the legislature.

Well, it seems the luncheon party was a success, though Sadie couldn't get anything but a sketchy report from Jean. Yes, she did meet Courtney. He hadn't made any window exit, either. He'd said some very clever things, Jean thought, and afterwards he'd played the violin for her. Yes, she did think him rather an odd person, but somewhat interesting. He had asked if he might call. As for the Watrous ladies—Jean would only shrug her shoulders.

"Now, I wonder what she meant by that?" demands Sadie.

"By me!" says I. "Perhaps she was tryin' to scratch a mosquito bite."

When Sadie gets curious, though, she don't take it out in guessin'. So I ain't surprised when she announces this garden party in honor of Miss Jean Merrity. I saw the scheme. She meant to get 'em together where she could see for herself. I was a bit staggered, though, when I hears Courtney is comin' too, for I never knew of his goin' much of anywhere before.

As a rule I plan to duck affairs like that; but this bein' set for Saturday afternoon, and me gettin' sick of stickin' around town with the mercury climbin' towards ninety, I does land out home in time to make myself useful.

I'd lugged out chairs, and set up tables, and squeezed lemons for the fruit punch, and tried to keep little Sully from snitchin' enough cake to feed his whole baseball team.

Sadie hadn't asked a mob this time—only fifteen or twenty hand-picked guests. The Watrouses were the first to arrive, all draped in black and jet, as usual, and with every window of the limousine shut tight.

At four-thirty Jean hadn't shown up, although we was lookin' for her to boom in any minute in her gray roadster with the cut-out wide open.

Trust Jean, though! At four-thirty-five

something rolls in through the driveway gates. It's the two-wheeled basket-bodied cart that the Motts' governess used to use. And between the shafts is a buckskin colored mustang, with Jean drivin'.

"I couldn't resist," says she, "when I saw that cart stored in the old carriage-house. I always did want to ride in one. So I sent back to Bedelia for Ginger. It's an experience for him, too."

Ginger looked it. Seemed sort of dazed over the whole business, and the way he'd twist his neck around to gaze at that contraption behind him was curious.

Then, too, everybody has to swarm around and inspect the outfit. Even the ladies Watrous peered through their shell stick-glasses at it from a safe distance while they made Jean tell all about how she came to be driving around in such a queer rig.

"What an original idea!" says Mrs. Watrous.

"Yes, quite unusual," echoes Miss Cornelia.

They're that kind, you know. Why, most likely they'd been brought up in such carts; but, now they've gone out of style, they has to let on they don't know anything about 'em. Minds like rubber stamps, they have. And I caught an odd flicker in Jean's eyes as she listens to 'em purr on.

About then, though, I'm chased off to the back of the house on some errand, and when I gets around front again Jean is continuin'

the exhibition by givin' little Sully a ride out to the gates and back.

Next she picks up some of the older folks; and the first thing I know, she's stopped in front of where the Watrouses are sittin' prim and stately, and seems to be invitin' them to take a trip.

Why they should ever do it I can't imagine. Maybe they'd gone temporarily nutty, or perhaps Jean could be more enticin' than I'd ever given her credit for. Anyway, while I'm grinnin' at the nerve of her, in they climbs.

Up to that minute both Ginger and Miss Jean had behaved as meek and respectable as if they'd come from West Newton, Massachusetts. And I don't know but Jean would have kept right on if the mustang hadn't broken the spell. I wouldn't want to say he knew what kind of parties was bein' loaded in behind him, or that he didn't. Anyway, Mrs. Watrous and Miss Cornelia had no sooner settled themselves on the cushions than he lays his ears flat and promptly proceeds to back.

"Whoa now, Ginger!" says Jean, gentle but firm.

Nothing doing in the whoa line from Ginger. Right through a five-foot privet hedge he backs, across two rows of bush beans, and bang into a hot-bed where I was coaxin' along a couple of hundred celery plants. It was some crash as the wheels broke through the glass. He wasn't satisfied, though, until he had his hind feet in

and had kicked out all the panes he could reach. And you should have heard the squeals that came from the ladies Watrous.

As I dashed to the rescue, Jean jerked a whip from the socket and laced it around Ginger's middle. He didn't like that a little bit. With two jumps he clears the hot-bed, breaks through the hedge in a new place, and lands in the drive again, headed towards the Sound. By that time, though, Jean has got a firm hold on the reins, and is standin' up with her knees braced against the high front of the cart.

One good pull, and she had Ginger back on his haunches with his ears almost in her lap. Mrs. Watrous and Cornelia tries panicky to climb out; but they was so scared they couldn't undo the door at the back.

"Sit still, both of you," commands Jean.

"Oh, p-p-p-please let us out!" begs Miss Cornelia.

"Not yet," says Jean. "I promised you a ride behind Ginger, and you're going to get it."

With that she slacks up on the reins, drops the mustang on to all four feet, whirls him around sudden, and gives him another taste of the whip. Once more they was off in a bunch.

Now, that drive of mine, you know, has two loops in it—one in front of the garage, and the other out by the gates. I didn't lay it out for any vest-pocket kite-track when I built it, but

that's what it makes—about ten laps to the mile, I should say.

It don't take Jean Merrity long to discover the possibilities of it.

"We-e-e-ough!" says she, cuttin' loose with a reg'lar cow-puncher yell you could have heard half-way to the station.

She's standing up, her feet well spread, arm taut on the lines, and swingin' the whip with the other hand.

You remember the old chariot race stunt they used to pull at the circus, where the bare-armed lady with the four grays always won from the man? Well, Jean had that act lookin' like a piano solo; for, while there was only one of Ginger, he made up in pep what he lacked in size. He was well named.

As he took the sharp curves he had his neck arched like a high-school stallion, his wicked little eyes seemed to blaze with excitement, and his nostrils was the color of a red flannel shirt.

Bumpety-bump, bump! they went around the corners, sparks flyin' as his shoes hit the gravel, and only one wheel touchin' at times. He sure could hump himself, Ginger, when he was properly urged.

And Jean was 'tendin' to that. I'd always thought that heavy face of hers never could light up. But it did then. Blamed if she don't look almost handsome. Anyhow, as she leaned to the sway of the cart and straightened up

on the free stretches, she was more or less graceful.

As for the ladies Watrous, they was havin' the ride of their lives, all right. Each had a desperate grip on the cart-sides and a panicky look in her eyes. Mrs. Watrous's black lid has jiggled over her left ear, while Miss Cornelia's was down over her eyebrows and her back hair was comin' loose.

Two, three, four times around the double loop Jean jumped that lively little mustang before she finally brought him up all standin', and vaulted over the front to grab him by the bits.

"You would, would you, you little imp?" says she, pattin' him on the nose soothin'.

Meanwhile, willin' and reverent hands was unloadin' what was left of the ladies Watrous and helpin' 'em into the house, where smellin' salts and extra hair-pins could be applied.

I was on the spot when Sadie hurries back to where Jean is still pettin' the mustang.

"Why, Jean!" says she. "Whatever made you do such a thing as that?"

"I'm sure I don't know," says Jean, smilin' satisfied, "unless—unless I knew they needed it so badly. The silly old frumps! If you only knew how I have ached to jar them out of their stupid, complacent arrogance! How they have got on my nerves with their peacock manners, their fussy ways, and their stereotyped speeches! I stood it all until I simply couldn't

stand another moment of it; and then—" Jean breaks off with a chuckle. "I don't care a rap," she adds.

"But what about Courtney?" asks Sadie. "What will he think?"

"Look!" says I, pointin' over to a bench. "I'll give you two guesses as to what Courtney thinks."

Honest, I never thought that long, sallow face of his could wear such a grin. And he's wipin' tears out of his eyes, like he'd been laughin' until he had cried. He is just startin' over towards us.

"Really," says he, "I never saw anything so funny in my life! If you could have seen mother's face as she went around those curves! And Aunt Cornelia, with her hat over her eyes! Oh, it was rich! And you, Jean, you were splendid, Junoesque—no, like Diana. That's it; you were the goddess Diana. And I—I think you are a wonderful girl. I—I wish I could always——"

Then he breaks off, right in the middle of what he's sayin', and blushes until he's pink clear down the back of his neck.

The poor fish had just remembered that he wasn't talkin' to Jean alone in the moonlight; that is, if he knew he was talkin' at all. My guess is that he'd been rushed off his feet and had simply babbled right out.

Anyway, it seems to make a hit with Jean. She pinks up grateful. Here was someone she

hadn't scared to death, at least. Also someone who was strong for her, big as she was.

"Thank you, Courtney," says she, takin' him gentle by the arm and leadin' him off to one side. "You were saying that you wished—I'll tell you! Perhaps I should understand if you played it to me on the violin."

"H-m-m-m!" says Sadie, as we watches 'em stroll off arm in arm.

"Can you beat that?" says I. "She wants him to play it to her on the violin! O you Susie Sourdimple fryin' the mush! I'll bet, though, she's as good as got him roped and branded."

Which was my first straight hunch about Jean.

It was all settled before they came back from that stroll.

"Just imagine!" says Sadie. "Those two!"

"I expect it's a case," says I, "of likin' what you ain't. Oh, yes; old stuff, I know, but always surprisin'. And I hope I'm around when Reney hears. Ruh, ruh for Reney! She's pulled the impossible."

CHAPTER XX

ON THE GATE WITH WALDO

Course when you find a neighbor's pet dog runnin' loose in your back yard and in danger of bein' sent to the pound, it's only decent to collect the little beast and return him. So when Sadie discovers this bedraggled, woolly little white kyoodle trailin' a broken lead around through her pansy beds, I gets a sudden call.

"Why, it's the Tollands' Fluffy," says she. "He's broken away again."

"Don't blame him," says I. "I would, too, if I had to live with the Tollands."

"Now, Shorty!" protests Sadie. "I wouldn't be so prejudiced. And you know how badly they felt the last time he got away. No doubt they think a lot of the dog. Do catch him and take him back."

"Oh, very well," says I. "But I will admit I had other plans. Come here, you homely man's purp!"

Somehow, that didn't entice Fluffy as much as it might. He eyes me suspicious, and then scampers off around the corner of the garage. Only about as big as two handfuls of cotton waste, he is, but he surely is full of yelps and action.

No, it wasn't near runnin' my legs off tryin' to corner Fluffy, or crashin' through a clothesline, or the dive I took over a wheelbarrow, that got me peeved. I just naturally don't care for that breed of dog. Never did. You know, one of these pink-eyed, useless little house insects that looks like sort of a cross between a feather-duster and a dish-mop, without any of the good points of either.

So after I'd captured him, and driven nearly a mile in the roadster with him tied in beside me, yelpin' and snappin' all the way, maybe as I walks up to the Tollands' front door and rings the bell I might not have been in a folksy frame of mind. If it had been anyone else, I suppose I'd felt different. But the Tollands— Well, I don't want to knock 'em, but they're just the kind of people who'd own a dog like that. The sort who'd call him Fluffy, too.

Anyway, S. Waldo is that type. You could tell by lookin' at him. I can't say why, either, only you could. One of these stiff, frozen-faced, mealy-mouthed parties, Waldo is; who always dresses just so, always says commonplace things, and does 'em. A human rubber stamp.

I understand he's head salesman in the silver department of a big jewelry store, and I expect when it comes to assistin' kind friends to pick out weddin' presents, or unloadin' table junk on the limousine trade, he's quite a star. But outside of that I can't see but what he just clutters

up the earth. Not that he's an active nuisance, for he's about as neutral as they come. He don't belong to the yacht club, or play golf or tennis, or go fishin'. I suspect he would indulge in croquet if he dared. Maybe he knits in secret. Anyway, he don't seem to have any open vices or bad habits, such as cigarette smokin', or attendin' ball games, or wearin' loud neckties. No, he's a perfectly proper party, Waldo. Strictly.

Why he should want to bluff along on a fifteen hundred dollar salary out here among such a set of near-plutes as we got in Rockhurst-on-the-Sound was a mystery to me until I heard he confided to someone that he did it for business reasons. Thought he could pull in new customers from among his neighbors; and, besides, he had an idea he was livin' up to his job. Anyway, the Tollands manage to pay the rent of this little hip-roofed cottage, and with one maid and no kids they make a fairly good showin'—specially on Sunday, when S. Waldo sports a silk lid and a frock-coat. One of the ushers, I'm told, at St. John's.

It's clear Waldo never expects me to splurge on silverware, for all he ever favors me with is the stiffest sort of nod. Almost acts like he was afraid to be seen speakin' to me. And when him and I are takin' the same train to town, he always walks to the other end of the platform. Not that this makes me feel disappointed. I'm generally relieved; for if I had

to talk to Waldo all alone for any length of time, I'm dead sure I'd say something that would make him blush. He might have to slap me on the wrist—there's no tellin'.

As for Mrs. Tolland, she's a little mouse of a woman, with big eyes and a pointed chin, who never looks up except to gaze admirin' at S. Waldo. An odd pair of misfit neighbors they make.

So you can figure I ain't soothed any by the fact that I'm still standin' on their front doorstep three or four minutes after I'd first rung the bell. I punches the button again, this time givin' it a good long push. I can hear the buzz, too, somewhere in the back of the house. But nothing happens in the way of an answer. Yet I could swear one of the front shades had been pulled down since I came, and that someone had tiptoed across the front hall. I was pretty sure, too, that Waldo was at home; for this was Saturday afternoon, and I'd seen him get off the one-fifteen.

What was the big idea, anyway? Had they caught sight of who it was and thought they were blockin' off a social call? Fluffy was gettin' restless, too. Twice he'd almost satisfied his yearnin' to sink them sharp little teeth of his into my wrist. Was I expected to camp out there all day, holdin' this little brute by the scruff of the neck, just for the sake of doin' a neighborly act?

I tries rappin' on the door panels. That's

followed by a soft scurryin' inside, and then more silence. I had a feelin' someone was tryin' to peek at me from one of the upper windows. So I steps back on the walk and gazes up at the second story.

"Hey, Tolland!" I sings out. "For the love of Mike!"

Then I can hear whisperin', as though some excited debate was goin' on. Next the window over the front door is opened a few inches and the shade pulled back.

"Is that you, McCabe?" asks a husky voice that sounds something like Waldo's.

"Did you think it was an enemy bombin' squad come to blow you up?" I asks. "Course it's me."

"Are—are you alone?" he asks.

"No, blame it all!" says I. "Can't you see I've got your bloomin' pup, that I found strayin' round my grounds?"

"Oh, Fluffy!" says he. "We didn't know what had become of him, but we couldn't—er—I'll be right down."

And when he had unlocked and unbolted the door, I hands over the dog to him without a word. I was turnin' to go, when he makes a half-hearted stab at apologizin'.

"You see," says he, "we—ah—we were rather expecting someone else."

"Huh!" says I. "Meant to give 'em a real cordial reception, didn't you?"

Waldo chokes over that a bit; but he seems

to want to do a little more explainin', so I waits for him to go on.

"As a matter of fact," says he, "it was someone we wished to avoid: a—er—a distant relative of—ah—of Mrs. Tolland."

"Oh, yes," says I. "I see. They will happen in the best of fam'lies. A soused uncle, or something like that, eh?"

I hears a gasp from behind Waldo, and guesses that Mrs. Tolland has been some jarred by my remark.

"Oh, no, indeed," puts in Waldo hasty. "Nothing at all like that. A step-cousin who is—well, somewhat eccentric, to say the least."

"A bughouse party?" I asks cheerful.

"We-e-ell," says he, "I should hardly describe her in just that way. But tell me, McCabe; you did not happen to meet, did you, as you came along, a rather stout, middle-aged woman with short, grayish hair? She would probably be without a hat, quite sunburned, and most likely carrying a bundle, possibly a camping bag or knapsack."

"No," says I; "I don't remember passin' any such freak. Promised you a visit, has she?"

"Threatened, rather," says Waldo. Then he turns to Mrs. Tolland. "Had we not better tell all to Professor McCabe, Louise, since we have divulged so much? I am sure we can rely on his discretion and—and possibly he might suggest something that we could do."

So, the next thing I knows, I've been asked into the neat little sittin'-room, the door has been locked behind us, and I'm hearin' the whole tale about this batty cousin, just as though I'd been on chummy terms with 'em all along.

But come to get right next to the Tollands and they ain't so bad. I begins to suspicion that they're more or less human. And they act so nervous and desperate that I'm kind of sorry for 'em. Besides, I might have been some curious.

Quite a roamer, Cousin Jane is, I take it. And she has a cute little habit of pouncin' down on her relations and stayin' for months at a time. Not that she'd ever inflicted herself on the Tollands so far, for up to last fall she'd been caromin' around out on the Pacific coast, from Los Angeles to Seattle. Had even wandered as far up as Alaska.

Her people sort of took it for granted that Cousin Jane meant to stay West for good; but here last fall she'd bobbed up at Aunt Kate's, back in Augusta, Maine, and stuck around until after Christmas. Then she'd gone to Brother Robert's, in Worcester, Massachusetts, and they didn't get rid of her until Easter. When last heard of she was with Sister Mabel in New Haven, and had been askin' for the Tollands' address. So there was no hope of escapin' her.

"Only fancy," says Waldo. "For nearly

two weeks we have been expecting her to appear at any moment. Every time a carriage drives up, or a car stops out front, or the bell rings, we ask each other, 'What if it should be Cousin Jane?' So we—we have shut things up on the street side, and stopped answering rings, in the hope that— Well, you see. And it rather gets on one's nerves, you know."

"I should think it might," says I. "What's Cousin Jane's specialty? Slippin' Paris green in the coffee or hidin' bombs in the beds?"

Mrs. Tolland indulges in another gasp, and Waldo almost turns pale.

"Oh, no, no, I assure you!" says he. "Miss Emmons is an entomologist."

"As bad as that!" says I. "Then why don't you have her put away for it—in a sanatorium?"

"You misunderstand," says Waldo. "She collects bugs and—and things; studies their habits, writes books about them."

"Oh!" says I. "Course, that's odd enough, but it ain't anything you can be locked up for. Why all the panic over her comin', though?"

"But she dresses so—so unconventional," goes on Waldo. "And she does such strange things. Why, she has been known to live all alone in a cabin, miles from anywhere, for months at a time. And she seems to have no regard for civilized customs, absolutely. At Sister Mabel's, for instance, she would go for long tramping trips in the woods, wearing very

short skirts and—rubber boots! She appeared that way during a card party one afternoon. True, we do very little in a social way, yet we have our reputation to consider. And if she should be seen coming and going here in her camping costume—well, what would people think?"

I got the point. Waldo could see himself some fine Sunday mornin', all dolled up in his frock-coat and shiny lid, meetin' Cousin Jane dashin' around a corner in her gray flannel shirt and wadin' boots, maybe danglin' a dead snake by the tail.

"Besides," says he, "we are quite unprepared for guests. You see, our cook is leaving, and we are not sure of getting another. So we simply can not receive Jane if she comes. Can we, Louise?"

"No, I can't see how we could," sighs Mrs. Waldo. "Isn't there something we can do, though, besides this?"

I scratches my head thoughtful.

"Lemme see," says I. "Course, there ought to be a law prohibitin' visits from freaky relations. If they could only be divorced out of the fam'ly, now."

That strikes Waldo as a happy thought.

"If one only could," says he. "Just think! Why, I might divorce Louise, or she might get a separation from me; but from this Cousin Jane of hers, no matter how just the complaint, there seems to be no escape."

"No," says I; "relations are wished on you for good. And it's all wrong. I don't see, though, but you'll have to run the risk of shuntin' Jane and let it go at that; just have to keep yourselves dug in until after the grand attack."

Before I went, too, I'd promised that if I thought of any new stunt, such as puttin' up barbed-wire entanglements or layin' mines, I'd let 'em know. Also that if I saw her headed in their direction I'd do my best to shoo her off.

And from then on Waldo and I got almost chummy. When we met at the station mornin's, we'd swap sort of a sleuthy hail.

"Well," I'd say, liftin' my eyebrows mysterious, "anything break out your way yet?"

And Waldo, he'd glance around cautious and shake his head.

"Louise had one bad scare yesterday," he'd say, "but it turned out to be only an agent."

Or maybe it would be a Salvation Army solicitor.

I gathered that they were just layin' low, keepin' the shades down, and not exposin' themselves more than necessary.

Must have been a week later, when one evenin' Sadie and me was comin' home from a drive about dusk, that I spots this suspicious-lookin' party trudgin' up from the station. She had a hat on, but it's considerable askew, and from the way her gray hair is bobbed up

it might well be short. Besides, she's luggin' a tacky-lookin' straw suit-case with stuff strapped on the outside.

I slows up for a better look as we're about to pass her, and I ain't a bit surprised when she gives me the hail. She wants to know if I can tell her where the Tollands live.

A tough-lookin' party she is, too, come to get close.

"The Tollands?" says I. "I don't think you'll find 'em at home." Which was true enough.

"Worse luck!" says she. "And after cartin' this bag near a mile!"

"I can give you a lift back, if you like," says I. "There's a train in at seven-fifteen."

"Thanks," says she; "I'll be much obliged."

So we loads her into the rear seat with her luggage.

She didn't have much to say on the way down, only grumbled to herself, and we got her there just in time for her to get a ticket.

"That was easy," says I to Sadie. "I'll call up the Tollands when we get home and let 'em know. They'll be relieved, I expect."

But they wasn't.

"Great heavens!" says Waldo. "That wasn't Cousin Jane. It must have been the new cook. She was due half an hour ago."

"Sorry," says I, "but she fitted in with your description. Next time I'll ask if she's a

member of the fam'ly or is a recruit for the kitchen."

I didn't think there would be a next time. Didn't seem likely. In fact, I'd about lost interest in the Tolland siege, and was 'most forgettin' about their batty cousin, when here the other afternoon, as I drops off the smoker at our station, I'm nearly run down by a husky female who piles off the next car ahead.

"Excuse me, young man," says she; "but how do I get out to Waldo Tolland's place?"

And say, there's the tanned face, the short gray hair, and the queer-lookin' bundle.

I'll admit she ain't wearin' either rubber boots or leggins. She is dressed sort of mannish, though, in a plain tailored dress, with a simple black sailor on her head.

"Why—er—it's quite a ways," says I, sort of edgin' off.

"Well, what of that?" she demands. "I suppose I can get a jitney or a carriage, can't I?"

"You might," says I, "and then again—well, I couldn't say. Fact is, I'm in a hurry."

"Are you?" says she, givin' me the once-over and steppin' around so she blocks my way. "But not in so great a hurry, I hope, that you can't afford to be civil. You know where Mr. Tolland lives, don't you?"

"Why, ye-e-e-es," says I draggy. "That is, where he did live. It—it's out on the Post Road."

"Humph!" says she. "And when was the last time you knew of his living there?"

"Yesterday," says I, grinnin' foolish.

She snorts again, and eyes me threatenin'.

"Nice kind of neighbors Mr. Tolland has, I must say," says she. "That'll do for you, young man. I see a taxi over there, and I'll get it myself. Thank you for nothing."

"Gee!" says I, drawin' in a long breath as I makes my escape. "I wonder."

For a couple of days now I've carried that guilty feelin' around with me. I had a hunch I'd made another bad break, but I wasn't sure. Somehow, though, I didn't care about meetin' Tolland, so twice I rushes through breakfast and takes an earlier train.

Here this mornin', though, I overslept, and there was nothing to it but for me to show up for the eight-twenty-six as usual.

I'd counted on dodgin' Waldo; but as luck would have it, he comes strollin' around the corner of the baggage-room where I'm pretendin' to be lookin' for some express.

"Why, there you are, McCabe!" says he, and I can't tell whether he's enthusiastic, or just excited.

There was no use tryin' to duck any longer, though.

"Go on; spill it," says I.

"Why, what do you mean?" asks Waldo.

"Ah, the strange female party," says I. "Was she Cousin Jane or the new cook?"

"Why, both," says he.

Then it was my turn to gawp. "Eh?" says I.

Yes, it had been Cousin Jane, all right. And when they hadn't answered her first ring she'd simply walked right around to the back of the house and cornered 'em in the garden.

They'd surrendered, too, without firin' a shot.

But it seems she wasn't half as bad as the other relations had let on. For one thing, she wasn't collectin' any insects around Rockhurst. She was off the bug game for a spell. It appears that her book on the subject had made something of a hit, and through that she'd just landed a commission from some museum to go clear to South Africa, where bugs was thicker and more entertainin' in their habits.

She was only stoppin' off here for a week or ten days until she could collect a proper outfit and get a steamer.

So she wasn't stompin' around the parlor in rubber boots these days. Meantime, though, findin' the Tollands without a cook, and Louise tryin' to feed herself and hubby out of tin cans, she turns to and shows 'em what really good eatin' tastes like.

"And I say," says Waldo, "it is wonderful what delicious dishes she can prepare from simple things. What she calls camp stew, for instance. Really, I've never known until now what good food was. But we have a regular

cook coming to-day, and I was anxious to see you before you——"

"Trust me," says I. "I've quit crashin' in on your visitors. I won't steer her off."

"Please don't," says Waldo, "for Cousin Jane has promised to stay with us long enough to train her in. She is quite a remarkable woman, you know, Cousin Jane."

"Huh!" says I. "Wish you'd found that out before you got me rung in on this fool gate-guardin' act. And sometime, Waldo, just for sport, point me out as I'm drivin' by, and get her to register her opinion of me."

CHAPTER XXI

LITTLE SULLY COMES THROUGH

I EXPECT it was Luther J. Whittle got me sore on the war. Sounds simple, too. I feel sheepish about admittin' it, even now. For it wasn't Whittle's fault, exactly. Why, he's probably as inoffensive a party as you'd find in the whole of Rockhurst-on-the-Sound. In fact, I hardly knew he was on earth up to a few months ago.

You know how it is. There's some people you just don't count in, they're such dead ones. Whittle was that kind—a thin little man with thin, grayish, close-cropped whiskers, and mild, light-blue eyes inclined to water up. Always wipin' his spectacles, and always beamin' through 'em gentle after he'd finished. Didn't mean anything by it. Just a chronic beamer.

He was fairly well fixed. Retired, but no plute. Lived in a big gray house down on the Point; but his place sets so far back from the street, you'd hardly notice it. Not that he did any hermit act. No; Whittle was counted as one of our leadin' citizens, when he was remembered. He was a bank director, vice-president of the Electric Light Company, and was on the

trustee board of the Yacht Club. But I never heard of his havin' much to say. He chipped in generous, though, when we was runnin' our Reform campaign, and went to the meetin's reg'lar; but, somehow, he didn't figure any in the hot debates we had.

The fam'ly was a good deal like that in the social doin's, too. Him and Mrs. Whittle and the young folks went around some, but I doubt if they'd ever been missed if they hadn't. Miss Mildred wasn't bad lookin', either, but sort of pale and delicate and old-maidish. As for Ernest, he was one of these string-beany youths, awkward and shy. You generally saw the four of 'em together.

So you might think I was hard up for a grouch when I worked one up on Whittle. It wasn't until we got into the war that he begun to bother me at all. One day, comin' out on the 5.07, he camps down beside me and stows a bundle between his knees.

"Ah, McCabe!" says he, beamin' friendly. "I presume you can guess what this is?"

"Eh?" says I, tearin' my eyes loose from the sportin' page and glancin' at him curious. He's a little flushed, and seems some excited.

"I say," he goes on, pattin' the bundle, "you can guess, can't you?"

"Why," says I, "it might be the week's wash."

"No, no," says he. "Think! War has been declared, hasn't it?"

"Oh!" says I. "And you're stockin' up on groceries. That it?"

He looks pained and disappointed.

"It is the flag of our country," says he.

"Ye-e-es?" says I, kind of vague.

"I intend," says he, "to throw Old Glory to the breeze at once. I have been meaning to for some time, but now— Well, it is the least we can do, isn't it? Yours is already out, I suppose."

I admit that it ain't.

"But you will be getting one right away, I am sure," says he. "We must show our colors, if nothing more. Everyone must, eh?"

Well, as a matter of fact, I had been thinking of putting out a pole and flying a flag from the front of the house, just because I like the looks of it. But when Whittle goes on insistin' that it's a thing I ought to do, somehow I bucks. No gettin' away from him, though. He explains how buntin' is scarce, owin' to the big demand, and if I want to be sure of gettin' a flag right off, I'd better let him 'phone in an order for me. And the first thing I knew, I'd told him he might. Hanged if he don't insist on comin' around, a few days later, to help me raise it.

"There!" says he, takin' off his hat as I hoists away. "Our national emblem! Beautiful, isn't it, McCabe? And here! I've brought you a button for your coat lapel. We should all show our colors, these times."

So I'm duly decorated. Course, I don't object to such things in a general way. It's all right to plaster yourself with red, white, and blue bow-knots, and shields and mottoes and such truck, if you feel that's the thing to do. But I'd always shied at advertisin' my sentiments that way. Yet, after Whittle had wished this gold-plated enamel button on me, I didn't feel like takin' it off, for fear of hurtin' his feelin's. He seemed so much in earnest about it.

Well, it was the same way about the Liberty bonds, and raisin' the Red Cross fund, and half a dozen other things. Almost before the schemes got well started, Whittle was at me about 'em, urgin' me to talk 'em up. Not naggy or disagreeable. He just seemed to take it for granted I was as enthusiastic as he was.

And inside of a month or so he'd come out of his shell wonderful. He was chairman of the loan committee, organized the Red Cross drive, and so on. I expect I'd have done my share all right, if there hadn't been any Whittle. Maybe I'd hung back a bit at first, to think it over. But I never had the chance. He'd come around and drag me in at the very start.

"Hang it all!" I says to Sadie. "Whittle acts like this was his war."

Then, there was that remark of his about the time they was signin' up for the draft. I think it was the day after when he hails me from across the street and comes paddlin' over.

"Well, friend McCabe!" says he. "I presume you registered?"

"No," says I. "I'm a few months too ripe."

"Too bad!" says he, shakin' my hand sympathetic. "I had hoped that— Well, perhaps you may serve in some other way."

I wanted to tell him I was just as satisfied for 'em to run the bloomin' war without me. I've never been very strong for this hep-hep stuff, and I hadn't quite doped out what we was fightin' for, anyway. Also, I'd listened to so many of these Wall Street chin patriots, who clipped Steel coupons all day and then went out in the evenin' to sit on a platform and cheer the grand old flag, that I'd grown a bit leary. Whittle might mean it all, and maybe he was bein' useful; but he knew there was no chance of *his* bein' called on to anything more risky than preside at some meetin'. If there was, would he be such a war booster? I wondered.

Even after meetin' him and Ernest in town that day, I still had my suspicions. It seems Ernest had volunteered; for there he was in a pair of wide-bottomed blue trousers, and half a yard of thin white neck showin' above the low-cut point of his middie blouse.

"Well, well!" says I. "So the youngster has joined up, has he?"

"Yes," says Luther J., blinkin' solemn. "He has enlisted in the Naval Reserve."

"You don't say!" says I. "Didn't know he

was quite old enough. Where you goin' to start in swattin' the Hun, Ernest?"

"I am at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, now, sir," says Ernest.

"Learnin' to handle big guns, eh?" I asks, winkin' at Whittle.

"Not yet, sir," says Ernest. "We have been painting sheds and peeling potatoes. But, when some of the new destroyers are finished, we shall probably get active duty. One is expected next week."

"As soon as that?" says I, turnin' to Whittle. "Then the young man is apt to get right into the thick of it before long. He'll be chasin' U-boats over in the Irish Sea. Fine business!"

Whittle takes off his glasses and wipes 'em careful.

"Ernest," says he, "is going to do his duty, wherever he may be sent; and we—his mother and sister and I—are glad and proud that he wants to do it. We are going to miss him a lot, though. Our only boy, you know, McCabe."

And say, blamed if he don't get choky over it. Them mild blue eyes of his come mighty near leakin', too.

Ernest, he don't say anything more, but just slips a hand into one of the old man's and gives him a grip.

"Yes, yes, my boy," says Whittle, buckin' up. "I know. But Mr. McCabe understands,

I am sure." And off they drift across Forty-second Street.

Struck me as a bit soft at the time. But then, it was about what you'd expect of a chap like Whittle. Kind of stagey, all that emotional stuff. I couldn't see why he should spring it on me.

You know how slow we was gettin' used to this war business. Little Sully was the first one at our house to get the fever. And he had it hard, as he does everything he catches, from baseball to measles. About all he wanted was to go where he could see soldiers. Well, that was easy. So every once in a while I'd let him trail along into the city with me for the day, and send him out with Swifty Joe, huntin' parades, or cruisin' around the enlistin' stations.

Say, I don't know which was the bigger kid about such things, little Sully or Swifty. Either of 'em would stand for hours, their mouths open, watchin' the khaki uniforms go by and listenin' to the drums.

But when a squad of the National Guards was detailed for duty around the Nut and Bolt Works, down in the village, Sully was just as thrilled as if Joffre and Pershing had set up joint headquarters there. Only half a dozen made up the squad, all from Rockhurst's Company K, and most of 'em young sports that Sully had often seen before. In fact, one was Jimmy Galvin, who used to come for our

grocery orders; and another was Joe Sarello, who'd lived, on and off, with Dominick, our outside man. A cousin or something, I believe, Joe was, and mighty little use. Anyway, that was Dominick's report.

"Joe, he no good," Dominick used to say. "No worka. Too smart for work. All time smoka da cigarette."

And, havin' known some of the others myself, I wasn't so much impressed with our local bunch of war heroes. Watchin' the Nut and Bolt Works to see that it didn't stray off to Danbury, Connecticut, or other foreign parts, struck me as about the sort of hard work they was built for. Most of 'em, anyway.

Yet, every time Sully could induce anyone to take him down where they'd pitched a couple of tents between the picket fence and the railroad tracks, he'd stand gawpin' awe-struck while the boys washed their undershirts in a tin pail or played auction pitch in the shade. And when Sergeant Galvin would put his bunch through the daily drill, Sully's blue eyes would get bigger and brighter. I got to admit, too, that the boys did look different. They'd lost a lot of their slouchy ways and their rough-neck manners. Even Joe Sarello could look you square in the eye.

About then Sully took to wearin' his Scout uniform every day, no matter how hot it got or how much his mother protested. I suppose the one big tragedy of his young life was that

he wasn't quite old enough to be a reg'lar Boy Scout, with the right to wear a badge and go on hikes. After he'd persuaded me to buy him a real gun, though, he felt better—and Sadie felt a lot worse. Almost broke up the fam'ly, that little .22 rifle did. But when Sully had promised never to load it in the house, and only shoot it off when I took him down to the shore and superintended, there was a truce declared.

Near as I could make out, Sully spent a good deal of time with the Guards, slippin' away on his bicycle every chance he got. His mother had a fit over that, too; but he begged so hard not to be shut off from it altogether that we compromised on two trips a week, providin' he wasn't late for meals.

And what he didn't learn about bein' a soldier you'd have to go to France to pick up. Seems he'd got so chummy with the Guards that they used to let him drill with 'em.

"Hey, pop," he says one evenin' marchin' into the livin'-room with all his kit on and his rifle over his shoulder, "you just see how I can do it. Go ahead, now—Comp'ny, 'shun!"

"All right," says I. "Comp'ny, 'shun!"

Sully raps his heels together and stands as stiff as a cart stake.

"What comes next?" I asks.

"'Sent humps!'" says he.

"Oh, yes!" says I. "'Sent humps! Shoulder humps!'"

"No, pop," says he. "This way: 'Shudder humps!' "

And, with a good deal of help like that from Sully, we got through the whole bag of tricks, with Sadie and little sister and Mother Whaley starin' at him appreciative. Course, we chuckled over it afterwards. It didn't do any harm to have him playin' soldier. Most of this war business the young chaps were at didn't seem much more serious.

So things drifted along into July without much happenin' except 'way off in places whose names you couldn't pronounce. Whittle, though, keeps on as busy as ever. He's been appointed on the Conscription Board, and is pushin' along relief work and such things. Then he gets this bug about organizin' a Committee of Public Safety.

"Ah, come!" says I, when he tackles me about it. "Ain't we safe enough here in Rockhurst without a committee messin' around?"

"We are at war, McCabe," says he, solemn.

"You mean you are, Whittle," says I, pokin' him playful.

"Every one of us," says he. "And we must organize to do our full duty by the country. Come around to my house to-night. I am depending on you."

Well, it seemed foolish, but I was some curious to see what nutty scheme he meant to spring this time; so after dinner I jumped into the roadster and drove down.

Whittle had rounded up about a dozen old boys,—Boomer-Day, the Hon. Bradley Gates, T. Lewis Cass, and so on,—and they was still waitin' for others to straggle in. Mainly they was talkin' about their boys—where they were and what they were doing. Two of 'em had sons up at Plattsburg, learnin' to be officers. Whittle tells how his Ernest has been disappointed about gettin' on a destroyer, but is scrubbin' decks on a fish-boat that is makin' believe drag mines out of the Ambrose Channel.

Then somebody asks Gates where young Brad is now.

"Mineola," says he. "Aviation Corps."

"Then he got in?" says Whittle. "Has he been up yet?"

"Has he!" says T. Lewis. "Every day for the last fortnight, five thousand feet or more. Writes he's to tackle tail diving next week. Cheering thought, eh? Tail diving!"

The old boy says it quiet enough, but he blows his nose violent afterwards, and I notice when he lights a fresh cigar that his fingers are shaky. Still, nothing more got to me than a flickery thought how this flyin' was risky work for rattle-headed boys such as Brad, and that probably the old man was a little anxious at times.

"Let's see," says Whittle, turnin' to me; "how old is that youngster of yours, McCabe?"

"Goin' on ten," says I.

"Oh, well," says Whittle, "it isn't likely he'll ever get a chance."

"Sad, ain't it?" says I, grinnin' sarcastic. "Kind of puts me out of it with the rest of you."

I expect it was the thunder shower that kept the others from showin' up; for half an hour later, when we'd settled down to business, only a couple more had arrived. Meantime them black clouds that had been rollin' up over the Sound were gettin' in a little work on their own account. There'd been some sharp cracks, the rain was pourin' down in sheets, and the Whittle butler and maids had been hustlin' around gettin' in porch chairs and shuttin' windows, when there comes this 'phone call for me.

"Mrs. McCabe would like to speak to you, sir," says the maid.

So I chases into the hall and answers.

"That you, Sadie?" says I. "Well, what—Eh? What's that again? Nonsense! He's just playing some trick on you. In the attic, maybe, or out to the garage. You have? Well, don't get panicky. He must be somewhere around the house at this time of night."

"But he isn't," insists Sadie. "I tell you, Shorty, he's gone."

And she finally beat it into my head that she meant it. Sully was missin'. Yes, he'd been sent to bed, all right. But he wasn't in it now. Hadn't been at all.

"And I don't know what to do," says Sadie, a bit trembly.

"Easy now," says I. "I'll be right up, of course, and— Wait a sec. It ain't likely, but— Say, just take a look in his room for that Scout costume and the rifle."

"I hadn't thought of that," says Sadie. "I'll look."

And after a two minute wait she reports: "They're gone, Shorty."

"Huh!" says I. "Then I'll go to the camp first. I'll let you know soon as I can. Don't get foamed up over it, old girl."

Then I skips back into the Whittle lib'ry, grabbin' my straw lid as I went.

"Sorry," says I, "but I got to quit. It's the youngster. He's missin'."

"Your boy?" says Whittle. "Out? In a storm like this!"

I nods. "Most likely sneaked off with those fool soldiers," says I. "He's been talkin' a lot lately about their night duty. Maybe he's tryin' it with 'em. I'll soon know."

"But—can't we help?" asks Whittle.

"Thanks, I guess not," says I; and makes a dash out into the rain.

It's lettin' up some, but the thunder is still rollin' around and the lightnin' flashes are comin' frequent. I may have trod a little impulsive on the accelerator goin' up from the Point. I know I did some fancy skiddin' as I turned off the Post Road.

There's a short cut to the camp across the fact'ry grounds when the gates are open daytimes, but now they are locked. I couldn't wait to drive around, so I left the car at the truck entrance and started skirtin' along the nine-foot picket fence; stumblin' over slag heaps, splashin' through puddles, and crashin' into bushes. If it hadn't been for the lightnin', I'd made a worse mess of myself than I did. As it was, I lost the straw lid early in the game, and caught a trouser leg on some barbed wire.

But I kept plungin' ahead for the tents. I knew the camp was somewhere beyond the second fence corner, and that as soon as I got past the first angle I should strike a path. As I remembered, there was a little brook ran into the company's grounds about there, with a plank across it. I ought to be able to tell when I got near by the slope of the ground. Yes; here it was. I'd slowed down, and was sort of feelin' my way, incidentally gettin' tangled up with a clump of cat-brier, when all of a sudden out of the dark comes a hail from a thin, pipin' voice that's makin' a swell bluff at bein' gruff and harsh.

"Halt, you!" it sings out.

And say, maybe I wasn't glad to hear it!

"Friend," says I.

"Who—what friend?" is the challenge.

"Only your pop, you young tarrier," says I. "What the blazes do you think you're up to here, Sully?"

"I—I'm standin' guard for Private Sarello," says he. "They—they've got him, pop."

"Whaddye mean, got him?" says I. "Here, where are you? Where's that blamed plank? Ah!"

A flash came just then that showed me the whole thing. It was only a glimpse, but I want you to understand it's some vivid picture—one I sha'n't forget very quick, either.

There's little Sully, standin' ready in the middle of the path, the water runnin' around his ankles, and drippin' off the brim of his Scout hat, but grippin' his dinky rifle firm and holdin' his chin well up. He's wet and scared and a bit unsteady about the lower lip; but when he'd heard someone stumblin' towards him through the bushes, he hadn't given an inch. He'd been right there with the stern "Halt!" stuff.

And back of him, lyin' in a heap, with one leg twisted under the other, and his head hangin' limp to one side, is a young fellow in a torn and muddy uniform. I was across in two jumps and down beside him. No, he hadn't been finished off. He was breathin', all right. It was Joe Sarello.

"Who did it?" I asks of Sully.

"The enemy," says he.

"Eh?" says I, gaspy.

Later on I got the facts. It seems some of the young toughs from the works had tried to guy Sarello. I expect he'd been a bit chesty

as he'd swaggered past 'em in his uniform. There'd been words passed, and once Joe had gone so far as to hook on his bayonet and jab a couple of 'em sort of easy. Anyway, they'd had it in for him, and to-night they'd made up their minds to get square. They had.

"But how did you come to be with him?" I asks Sully.

"I wanted to see the night tour," says he. "Joe said he'd take me, but when I got there he'd gone on duty. The Sergeant said I might go out and find him on this post, and when I came up they was all around him, kickin' an'—an' sluggin' him."

"And you didn't run back to tell Galvin?" says I.

"No," says he. "I—I let 'em have it, pop."

"Wha-a-at!" says I. "With the rifle?"

"Only two shots," says he, "and I ain't sure I hit any of 'em, but—but they beat it."

"H-m-m-m!" says I. "No wonder. Them .22 longs can sting some at close range."

"You—you ain't mad with me, are you, pop, for doin' it?" he asks.

"No," says I. "I guess that was the only thing to do in that case. I hope you winged one, anyway. And your friend here is comin' around, I guess; he's beginnin' to groan. Think you could find your way to the camp and get some of 'em out here?"

"Sergeant Galvin'll be comin' soon, pop,"

says Sully. "I've signaled—with the rifle, you know. They'll hear."

Sure enough, they had. And with Galvin's pocket flash we discovered that Private Sarello hadn't become quite a stretcher case. He'd been beat up pretty thorough, and a kick on the jaw had put him out for a while; but before long he's able to stand wabbly, with the help of one of his mates.

"They might have finished him, though," says the Sergeant, "if it hadn't been for Sully. That's some boy you've got there, Mr. McCabe. He ought to get mentioned in general orders for this."

"What he needs just now is a hot bath and bed," says I, pickin' Sully up, gun and all, and startin' for the roadster.

At home we found not only Sadie and Mother Whaley waitin' for us, but Whittle and three or four more from the meetin'. They'd got kind of excited after I left, and had come up to see how the search was progressin'.

When Sadie sees us, she don't stop to ask any questions at all. She just opens her arms and folds him in, muddy and wet as he is. I don't think she even noticed that I'm about in the same condition. Course, I has to sketch out for Whittle and the rest how I found Sully and what he was doin'.

"By George!" says Whittle. "Opened up on them with his little rifle, did he? Splendid! There's the real soldier stuff for you, gentle-

men. And only ten! What a pity, McCabe! We need 'em like that, sir. We need them for our army."

"Do you!" Sadie flashes out. "Indeed!"

She says it partly under her breath, though, and Whittle's so busy beamin' around that I don't think he noticed. I was kind of glad he didn't, too.

For right there I begun to get his drift—and mine. It wasn't just patriotic bunk with Whittle. He meant every word of it. Hadn't he sent his own boy? And that must have meant a lot to him—I could see now.

Suppose it was Sully who was out battin' around in an old tub of a trawler off Sandy Hook, and next month might be gunnin' for subs., or bein' gunned after? Suppose he was one of them Plattsburg boys, who before Christmas might be leadin' a squad of bombers over the top? Or if he was with young Brad Gates, up half a mile in the air practicin' tail divin'? How would we feel about it, Sadie and me, sittin' here at home, waitin' for news?

Say, all at once I knew.

"And," as I explains later to Sadie, "if that kind of fightin's got to be done, which it looks like it had, somebody's boys have got to do it, haven't they?"

"I don't care," says Sadie. "I'm glad it isn't to be Sully."

"Same here," says I, hearty. "Besides, I

guess he's done his share—to-night. I ain't sorry he did, either. It—it's sort of given me a hunch. I feel different about Whittle. I expect this is our war too. Eh, Sadie?"

THE END